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Contents

NOV / DEC
2015

VOL. 30
ISSUE 9

44

FEATURES

2016 FISHING GEAR PREMIERE 36

A Roundup of Cutting-Edge Tackle and Gear **By Chris Woodward**

BLUE CHRISTMAS 44

The Deep, Blue Pacific Surrounding Christmas Island – Known Best for Its Amazing Bonefish Flats – Teems with Big Wahoo, Yellowfin and More

By Dave Vedder

FREE-FOR-ALL AT THE FLOATERS 52

Expert Strategies for Fishing Deepwater Rigs Around the Gulf of Mexico

By Sam Hudson

THE WICKED TWITCH 60

How to Use the Venerable Jerk-and-Pause Retrieve to Turn On the Strike Response in Predators **By Doug Olander**

ON THE COVER:

This dog snapper hit a twitched Shimano Orca on the pause. Photo by Jason Arnold (jasonarnoldphoto.com).



36



92



DEPARTMENTS

- 12 EDITORIAL
- 14 GAME PLAN
- 20 FISH FACTS
- 26 GEAR GUIDE
- 32 NEW PRODUCTS
- 34 IGFA PENDING RECORDS
- SF BOATS**
- 70 FISHING MACHINES
- 76 FISH TRIALS
- 84 BOAT TIPS
- 86 ELECTRONICS
- 90 NEW BOATS & GEAR
- 92 BETTER BOATING
- 106 LAST CAST

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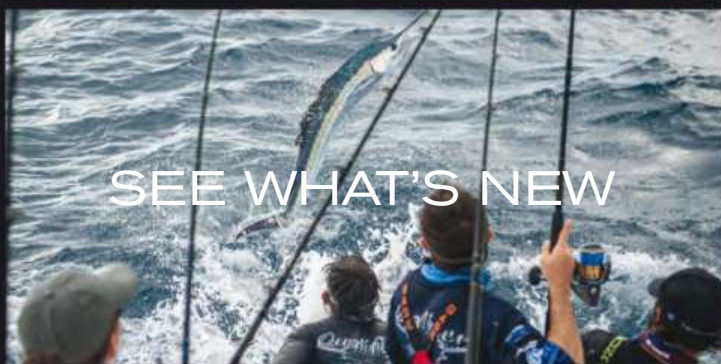
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FORBIDDEN FRUIT

Not long ago, someone sent me a link to a video that showed an angry (some might say abusive) deckhand's tirade against one of his clients out for a day's fishing. The level of outrage is so over the top that, if I didn't know better, I could think the angler had casually dropped a \$2,000 rod-and-reel over the side.

But I did know better. It was all about a banana.

The video shows the boat quietly trolling blue water when the deckhand spots a hapless chap innocently eating a banana. The reaction is immediate: The mate launches into the kind of invective that would have a censor cutting words as fast as he could hit the bleeper, and then he grabs the banana from the man's mouth and tosses it out to sea.

"Get all the bananas off the boat! Get the f---ing bananas off the boat!"

I feared that by the end of the video, the cringing angler would be tied up for a keel-hauling.

Anyone who knows saltwater fishing knows this is not some isolated incident. For many skippers, the fear that a banana or simply a visual representation might end up on their boat borders on paranoia.

And with good reason, they'll be quick to point out, and regale you with endless examples of incidents that absolutely prove beyond any doubt that one banana or a piece of banana bread or a tube of Banana Boat sunscreen on board will ruin the fishing day for everyone on the boat.

On the other hand, there are certainly anglers and charter captains who will, perhaps less emotionally, insist this silly superstition warrants no concern whatsoever, and who care no more about bananas on board than about strawberries, mangoes or eggplant.

What strikes me is the passion with which true believers pursue their convictions. Many skippers have "no bananas" advisories on their websites and remind patrons of them as they come aboard. (In a few cases, the whole banana-ban business has actually become a primary part of the shtick.) Some crew even search everything anglers carry onto the boat.

Is such behavior simply wise insurance? Or does it suggest fanaticism?

The answer of course depends on what one believes, and in that sense, I find it difficult not to think of the whole no-bananas custom in terms of religion. To believe the myth requires faith; some



have it and some simply don't.

Most captains either believe that bananas will ruin a fishing day (or do worse) or they don't (though some who aren't sure figure, hey, why tempt fate?).

Me? I'm just one fisherman, but no, I don't buy it. (Do I hear gasps?) Like Mr. Spock, I find the whole thing highly illogical.

But trying to argue the validity of the belief is as pointless as, well, arguing about the existence of a supreme deity. Sure, I could point to skippers who have made great catches with bananas on board, but that wouldn't change any true believers' minds.

(Though I do think about days when an anti-banana skipper can't put his anglers on fish and determines the cause is a banana on board, versus similar fishless days when no banana can be found on the boat, and wonder what, then, caused that bad luck?)

When fishing on the boat of a no-bananas disciple, I would never try to carry aboard the offending fruit nor even hum the Minions' banana song, out of respect for deeply held beliefs (not to mention the fact that to do otherwise could risk coming to blows).

I hope all anglers would do the same on anybody's boat where bananas ain't wanted — their boat, their rules. But I also hope skippers and mates can dial it down if they do discover the forbidden fruit on board. Keel-hauling is such a drag.

TRYING TO ARGUE THE VALIDITY OF THE NO-BANANAS PHILOSOPHY IS AS POINTLESS AS ARGUING ABOUT THE EXISTENCE OF A SUPREME DEITY.

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BY SAM HUDSON / NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2015 / VOL 30 — ISSUE 9

HOOK SWAP
Split-ring pliers help anglers replace trebles with in-line single hooks.

PERFECTING YOUR PLUGS

EASY MODIFICATIONS TO YOUR FAVORITE HARD BAIT CAN MEAN INCREASED HOOKUPS.

DURING A HOT SEATROUT bite years ago along an Indian River Lagoon shoreline, I realized I had to start modifying my hard baits. The trout were biting on every cast, favoring dark-green lipless twitchbaits, and many of the specks were swallowing the plugs deep.

Gut-hooking a trout destined for the fish box isn't a problem, but I was fun fishing, and tired of performing time-wasting surgery with needle-nose pliers to safely remove treble hooks. That day I committed to finding

alternatives to factory trebles.

I don't fault lure companies for selling lures with two or three trebles — it's their job to make sure lures hook fish. But do you use your smartphone, computer or even your truck as it was when shipped from the factory?

Or do you modify the products to your needs after purchasing them? Experts adjust their hard baits for an easier, more productive time on the water. Consider some of their useful mods for inshore and offshore situations.



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SINGLES CLUB

One efficient and eco-friendly option calls for replacing trebles with in-line single hooks, manufactured by companies such as VMC, Owner and Mustad. A large single hook is much more difficult than a treble for a fish to throw.

"The larger wire diameter of the single hook is much stronger than a typical treble hook's wire," says Capt. Jim Ross, a VMC pro staffer from Rockledge, Florida, "giving the angler an advantage in strength and allowing him to use more drag pressure without straightening hooks."

Yet the impetus for one major hook company to produce in-line single hooks was pesky, thick weeds, not necessarily increased strength. "Anglers down in the lower Laguna Madre fish the heavy grass in the summers," says Viet Nguyen, customer relations manager with Owner America. "Fishing trebles was impossible, so they would throw weedless topwater frogs or replace hard-bait trebles with ringed live-bait hooks."

Owner started manufacturing in-line hooks so anglers didn't have to add an extra ring to position the hook point upright, like a keel. VMC Hooks also produces an in-line for plugs, called the VMC ILS (in-line single hook). In 2015, Mustad added its own UltraPoint in-line single hook. Owner offers its in-line hooks in sizes 6 to 9/0, VMC in 1/0

KEVLAR ASSIST

In some cases, either for added strength or short-striking fish, Kevlar-rigged assist hooks can be attached to hard baits via a solid ring attached to a split ring.

"I take a page right out of the vertical-jigging book," says Capt. Jack Sprengel. "Attach your hookless lure to a split ring. To that, attach a 300- to 500-pound solid ring with a Kevlar cord and assist hook."

The hook trails back along the lure naturally while it's worked. Or it can be secured in place with a breakaway system via small zip ties, rubber bands or light rigging floss.

"When the fish takes the presentation, it's attached to a large assist hook and heavy solid ring for the fight," Sprengel explains. "The plug dangles carefree, out of the way, avoiding any stress or failure of the lure."



to 7/0, and Mustad in 1/0 to 8/0.

"With the newer style of in-line singles, lures actually have better action than with a treble hook," says Ross. "I believe this is the result of single hooks having less surface area and drag in the water than comparable trebles."

Forcing the eye in line with the rest of the hook makes it much easier to hook fish, explains Nguyen. "Anglers no longer need to use a ringed hook. Instead, replace a treble with an in-line hook using your split-ring pliers. I use the in-line hooks when fish are striking hard baits energetically. The hooks are great for catch-and-release too."

Besides offering easier releases and better functionality in grass, in-line singles also offer a safety factor. "I've

definitely noticed anglers catching more big tuna, or other species that go wild in the boat, like cobia, using the in-line hooks," says Nguyen. "They don't want all those barbs flying around in the cockpit."

By offering in-line hooks that are factory-rigged to specific plugs, some hard-bait manufacturers eliminate any need to swap out hooks. Williamson's Popper and Surface Pro lures, Shimano's Pop Orca 150, and Yo-Zuri's Sashimi Bonita all utilize single hooks.

HEAVY MODIFICATION

When considering plug modifications, particularly for big game, anglers must ask themselves a few questions: What are the target species and how do they feed? Will anglers keep or release the target species? How big are they? The answers can help determine how to modify your hard baits.

"With the advent of super lines, and advancements in the strength, durability and performance of jig-and-pop-style rods and reels, anglers are asking even more from their artificial baits," explains Rhode Island-based Capt. Jack Sprengel, who regularly targets big fish on poppers.

He prefers lures with heavy-duty through-wire construction.

"Tunas, trevally, jacks and even large



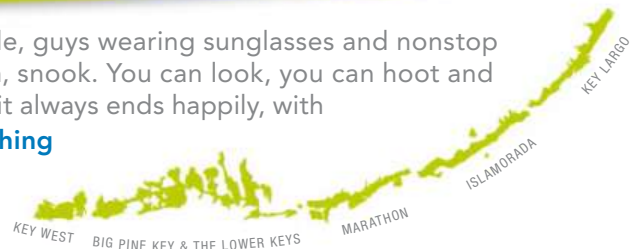
This yellowfin tuna blasted a popper rigged with a swivel and single live-bait hook. New in-line hooks no longer necessitate a swivel when rigged to plugs.

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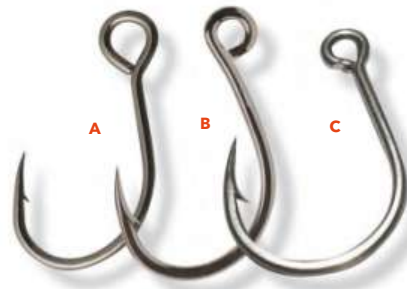


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snapper are well-known for their ability to destroy even the most well-made lures, with little more than their bite strength and dental attributes,” says Sprengel. “I can’t tell you how many high-end plugs I’ve had come back to the boat with straightened paper clips.”

To beef up his plugs, Sprengel first

adds durable Owner Hyper Wire or Spro Power split rings in the appropriate size. “Typically, the best size is 7 to 11, depending on the plug and hooks being attached,” he says. “To these, we attach massive [vacuum-tinned finish] trebles like Owner’s Stinger ST-66s or ST-76s. This combo of hook and ring is



Numerous hook manufacturers now produce durable in-line single hooks specifically for use with lures, including A) Owner, B) VMC and C) Mustad.

standard for my crew while targeting most big-game species, like the smaller tunas under 100 pounds that we intend to keep.”

For species that he’ll release, such as giant trevally or large cubera snapper, Sprengel recommends super-sharp, barbless Gamakatsu 24 GT Recorder treble hooks.

PINCH THE BARB

“I mash down the barbs on all my hooks, whether I’m casting jigs, plugs, spoons or flies,” says Capt. Bob LeMay, a South Florida-based captain who specializes in shark and tarpon fishing. “I’ll only keep the barbs on my offset circle hooks intact when targeting tarpon with cut or live bait, mostly to keep the bait on the hook.”

LeMay has been to the hospital on two different occasions for hook-related puncture incidents, so now he debarbs his hooks for self-preservation, he says.

The skipper specializes in fishing Everglades waters during the day, casting red-and-white plugs such as the Bagley Mullet and Bomber Long A to tarpon in 10 to 15 feet of water. “Pinching the barbs down on the hooks is the equivalent to ‘greasing up’ a hook,” he says. “I’m certain it’s easier to get a hook set into a tarpon.”

LeMay removes the first treble hook on his Long A (favoring the 7/8-ounce model), and replaces the rear treble with a No. 1 Owner 4X Stinger treble. “Replacing the rear treble turns a plug that only stays hooked momentarily into a bait that really sticks for the entire fight.”

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GAME PLAN **FISH FACTS** GEAR GUIDE NEW PRODUCTS

FISH FACTS

BY DOUG OLANDER / **NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2015** / VOL 30 — ISSUE 9



FISH FACTS ARCHIVES

SHORTBILL SPEARFISH

(Tetrapturus angustirostris)

THE RAREST OF BILLFISHES, AND ONE THAT FEW ANGLERS EVER SEE, IS THE SPEARFISH. THIS SHORTBILL WAS PHOTOGRAPHED OFF KONA, HAWAII. KONA AND NEW ZEALAND ACCOUNT FOR MOST CATCHES OF THE SPECIES, THOUGH THE IGFA ALL-TACKLE RECORD OF 110 POUNDS, 3 OUNCES, CAME FROM THE WATERS OUTSIDE BOTANY BAY, NEAR SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA.

INSIDE:



SOBAITY SEA BREAM

22



CHUB

22



SPOTTED SPOON-NOSE EEL

25

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BLUE-WATER PELAGICS

Eric Prince, Ph.D., courtesy of NOAA Fisheries Lab, Miami

MIDDLE EASTERN MYSTERY

While fishing stickbaits in the waters of southern Oman around Salalah, we caught quite a variety of fishes — including this one. It proved to be a tough fighter. What is it? How large does it get, and where is it found?

Laurent Laffère

Paris, France

Great fish, Laurent! You have caught a sobaity sea bream (*Sparidentex hasta*), which is one of the larger porgies (family Sparidae). Also known as the silver-black porgy, this species can be encountered in inshore coastal waters of the western Indian Ocean, from India throughout the Persian Gulf and nearby areas of the Middle East. They grow to a length of around 32 inches and a weight of at least 13 pounds. Their mouths are equipped with unusually large, fanglike teeth, showing that (for a porgy) they are highly predatory (especially if they eat stickbaits). They're known to feed mainly on a wide variety of baitfish rather than the mollusks and crustaceans more usually eaten by their relatives, which include other porgies such as pinfish or the Australian bream (*Acanthopagrus* species).

Compared to other sparids, sobaity sea bream are a relatively fast-growing species, reaching 12 inches long in their second year and 24 inches in their fourth year; trophy fish can live for at least 11 years. They are also protandrous

hermaphrodites, maturing first as males when they are 1 to 2 years old, before some change into females from age 2 onward. Spawning occurs once a year in the Persian Gulf, between January and March. — **Ben Diggles**

CHUB IN A TUB

I found this fish hiding inside a floating 55-gallon drum when we were out fishing for tuna and mahi off the coast of Long Island, New York. Under the drum were one mahi and a bunch of triggerfish. Then I looked into the drum and saw this guy. From its shape, I thought it might be in the damselfish family.

Capt. Kirk Fay

Blue Point, New York

Your fine specimen, beautifully photographed, is a chub, family Kyphosidae. Two species of chub might be encountered in your neighborhood: *Kyphosus sectatrix* (the



Chub



Sobaity sea bream

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Bermuda chub) and *K. incisor* (the yellow sea chub). I would need to count characteristics such as fin rays to decide which species is yours, but I can't make out those details from the photo. Both species get quite large (to about 28 inches), and are fine game fish and good eating, despite their typically foul-smelling guts. Young stages are strongly neustonic, meaning found at the surface, especially around floating objects — such as 55-gallon drums. Although adults are fairly drab in color, your critter is exhibiting a pale-spotted pattern said to be an aggressive behavioral display. Apparently it took exception to your invading its privacy.

— **Mike Fahay**

BLACK FINS TELL THE TALE

🔗 This barracuda measured 53 inches long and weighed 22.5 pounds. We



Blackfin barracuda

caught it in 165 feet of water off the northern Pacific coast of Nicaragua while trolling at 5.5 knots aboard our sailboat. Our lure was a pink-and-white plastic squid. Although great barracuda grow to be much larger, we understand that this is quite a beast

for a 'cuda in this region.

Jessie Mackelprang-Carter
Lynnwood, Washington

Ⓐ That toothy critter you folks caught is a blackfin barracuda, *Sphyraena genie*. Barracuda species tend to look

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similar, so I had to check with Ross Robertson at the Smithsonian Panama laboratory to make sure. The long black bars and black fins separate this species from all others. Blackfin are found in tropical waters from the Red Sea and Indian Ocean east to Mexico and down to Ecuador. However, in the eastern Pacific they do not appear to be particularly common anywhere, so your catch is pretty unusual. Reaching a length of about 5½ feet, this is one of the larger barracudas. Expect to find blackfin in substantial schools that often remain near the same reefs for months at a time. These fish are most active at night, when schools disperse and the individuals feed on other fishes. Barracuda, apparently including blackfin, have been linked in various tropical areas to ciguatera poisoning, so some caution should be employed when eating them.

— **Milton Love**

GAG ME WITH A SPOON-NOSE

Q My husband and son were recently fishing along Florida's Sanibel Causeway, and the red tide had washed up a few dead fish, mostly mullet and catfish. While walking along the shore, I came upon this dead creature, and would like to know what it is.

Karen Clark
Scotts, Michigan

A It's a bit difficult to offer a certain identification due to the fish's damaged condition, but based on its pigmentation, the position of its eye and what I can see of its dentition, I believe it's a spotted spoon-nose eel, *Echiophis intertinctus*. This species grows to more than 5 feet in length and ranges from North Carolina and the northern Gulf of Mexico south to Brazil, including at least some of the Caribbean islands.



Spotted spoon-nose eel

Not much is understood about the species' biology, but it's known to occur from inshore waters to depths of over 300 feet. The spotted spoon-nose eel belongs to the family Ophichthidae, the members of which are commonly called snake eels because of their snakelike appearance. — **Ray Waldner** 🐡

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FISH FACTS

GEAR GUIDE

NEW PRODUCTS

GEAR GUIDE

BY SAM HUDSON / NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2015 / VOL 30 — ISSUE 9



CRANKED:
Inside every reel
is a set of gears
working just as
hard as you. Did
you make the
right choice?

TOP GEARS

REEL MANUFACTURERS REVEAL WHAT MAKES THEIR GEAR COMPONENTS SO STRONG

INSIDE THE TOUGHEST REELS that anglers rely on for their most strenuous fights are key mechanisms that don't receive much attention: gears. Fishermen are quick to consider drag settings, bearings, line capacity and even gear ratios, but ignore details such as gear material and gear cut.

The toothy, circular components determine how strongly and smoothly a reel turns, especially under strain in drawn-out battles. Lesser gears can feel like a

wind-up toy, while superior gearing feels and acts more like a winch.

A reel's price is a strong indicator of what to expect from the gearing, but I wanted to know more. I asked top reel manufacturers about tooth cut, material, longevity and gear size. Some top companies were quick to protect their proprietary manufacturing processes, but others divulged more, providing an informative dive into conventional and spinning gears.

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MATERIAL GOODS

Gear materials can range from brass, zinc and aluminum to stainless, but for maximum strength and durability in saltwater conditions, stainless-steel drive gears and pinion gears are often the top options. Penn uses stainless on all its higher-end conventional lever-drag reels, such as the Internationals and Torques, says Penn senior product manager Mike Rice. “In most cases we use stainless steel for the pinion main gears,” he says, “but we prefer to heat-treat the pinion gears to increase the hardness.”

Zebco Brands uses stainless steel in all heavy Fin-Nor trolling reels, VS and VSB Van Staal reels, and Quantum Cabo offshore spinners because it is strong and durable, says Chris Littau, fishing manager of Zebco Brands. “But stainless is also expensive and difficult to make smooth,” he adds.

Different reel manufacturers utilize

different types of stainless. For example, Accurate uses 303 stainless steel; Alutecnos, 316 stainless; and Okuma, 17-4 stainless. Manufacturers may use different stainless alloys, or combinations of metals, dependent on the reel, but they try to keep the same alloys inside a specific reel to prevent electrolysis caused by dissimilar metals.

The different types of stainless can be confusing, but understand that each number helps explain the alloy’s unique makeup. “I think it’s important to point out that all engineered, industrial-grade metal materials are alloys,” says Littau. “I have heard people refer to an alloy as a cheap material, but in fact most pure materials are mostly useless without being alloyed.”

Stainless steel in the 300s, such as 303, 304 or 316, cannot be hardened by heat — hence the use of cold forging. Stainless 17-4 can be molded via heat treatment. In the fishing community,



Helical-cut gears have increased tooth mesh compared to a straight cut, creating more load-bearing surface and tooth engagement, says Okuma’s John Bretza.

stainless 304 is recognized for its corrosion resistance, while 17-4 is known for its hardness — still, most different types of steel can exhibit similar characteristics at different levels.

“The 17-4-grade stainless steel is known for its high strength and ability to withstand high temperatures far exceeding what a fishing reel can generate,” says John Bretza, director of product development at Okuma Fishing Tackle. “It gives us the strongest grade of material we can use and still have the corrosion resistance needed. It also gives us the ability to heat-treat, depending on our target application and desired hardness.”

For spinning reels, Shimano uses a cold-forged aluminum Hagane gear in its new Twin Power SW and Stradic models. “Aluminum is lighter than brass,” points out Chris Hess, a senior manager of product planning at Shimano. “The precision of our dies and expertise in the cold-forging process allow us to create a gear with incredible strength, durability and smoothness.”

In total, manufacturers utilize stainless and other alloys to create ideal shape, strength and durability in their gears to fit the exact needs of each reel.

THE CUT AND PROCESS

Have lever-drag reels advanced past traditional gear teeth, often called straight-cut? Penn has used the same gear cut for decades, using a lower pitch (teeth-per-inch ratio) because of its strength. Manufacturers such as Accurate also believe standard gear cuts are still an invaluable option.

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(Product # AR - 1077)

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Patent Pending

“Our gears are cut on CNC hobbbers and shapers,” says Ben Secrest, vice president of sales and marketing at Accurate Fishing Products. “We believe this is the best way to achieve a consistent, smooth, precise gear; plus we’re able to control tolerances and accuracy. Our spur gears are designed for direct power and torque.”

Daiwa and Alutecnos are not as open about their gear manufacturing processes, but both divulged that they cut their own gears using proprietary methods. Daiwa calls its gear-cutting process Digigear, or Digital Gear Design. For Alutecnos, each gear is robotically lathed at the TMB (their parent company) Italian factory, which also machines gears for ZF (an automotive supplier) and other

brands, says Alutecnos’ U.S. manager Mason Featherston.

“Van Staal gears are machine-cut spiral bevel gears, just like the rear end of a truck,” says Littau. “They are expensive to manufacture and make smooth, but will last a lifetime.”

Shimano spinning drive-gear teeth

are not cut, but instead fashioned through the cold-forging process: Precision gear teeth are constructed down to a micron level with one stamp of the cold-forge press. Hess believes that machine-cut gears are initially smooth, but over time can wear down faster and become rough under heavy loads.

REEL LONGEVITY

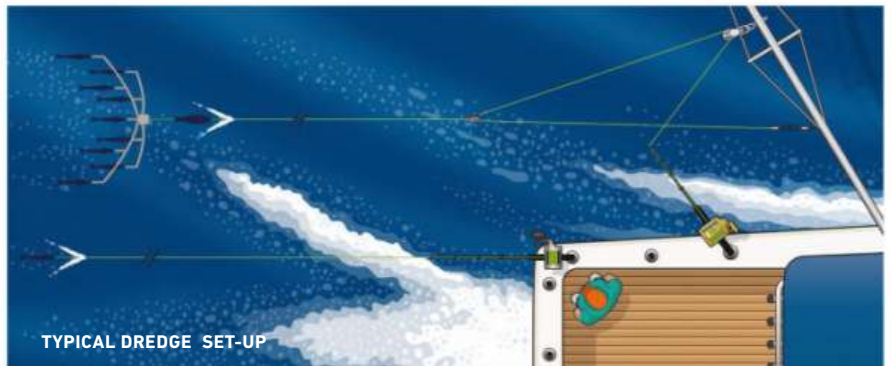
The best way to prolong the life of your reels is to do an annual check to see that your gears are properly lubed with the correct type and amount of grease. Taking them to a trusted tackle shop is a good option. The grease helps reduce friction and control heat buildup in your reel.

“Stainless-steel material gives gears longevity under normal fishing conditions,” says Accurate’s Ben Secrest. “The gears can last a lifetime. Softer metals can be warped when fished outside the intended design.”

Even still, corrosion is a constant struggle with saltwater gear. Daiwa figured out a new way to prevent salt intrusion in the bearings and gear box.

Daiwa’s Mag Seal technology uses a thin film of magnetic oil to keep salt water, dust and grit from entering the reel’s rotor bearing and gearing, says Curt Arakawa, Daiwa’s marketing manager. “Magnetic oil is one of a new generation of nanofluids that can change density and shape when a magnetic field is applied,” he says. “This method offers substantially less winding friction than would an ordinary rubber seal.”

Daiwa’s new Exist spinning reels feature Mag Sealed ball bearings on both sides of the drive gear, in addition to a Mag Sealed main shaft and line roller for trouble-free rotation and less maintenance in harsh saltwater conditions. Mag Seal is also used in the new Saltiga series to prevent water intrusion between the reel’s rotor and body.



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"If you open most reels and look at the engagement between the pinion and drive gear, you will typically see two gear teeth engaged," says Hess. "While these teeth offer good durability, there can be some 'play' between them, which can create a rough feeling." To overcome this, Shimano has

begun to use micro-module gear teeth. By making the gear-teeth module smaller, Shimano was able to eliminate a lot of the play and create a smoother-feeling gear through increased tooth engagement.

With the Makaira series, Okuma set out to create a silent-retrieve

big-game reel, so the company opted for helical-cut gears. Helical-cut (or spiral-cut) gears have more teeth meshing at any given time, translating into greater load-bearing surface area and more gear-tooth engagement between the main gear and the pinion gear, says Bretza.

"Helical gears are so strong that they can create axial loads that overpower other components, which is why our reel was built from the ground up around this system, to make sure that all the strength and pressure loads work together," says Bretza. "It's why other companies don't simply retrofit their reels with helical-cut gears."

MORE THAN ONE SIZE

Gear ratio has a meaningful impact on gear smoothness in fishing reels.

"Early on, anglers converting standard-gear-ratio reels to high speed would lose power," says Bretza. "The problem was that they kept the same-diameter gear and added more teeth to accomplish a higher gear ratio."

The gear teeth were smaller in size, which reduced pulling power, torque and overall durability. Today, modern reels often have drop-down gear boxes, offset from the frame to allow more room for larger gearing.

"In terms of size and strength, a thicker face width of the gear [creates] a stronger gear because you're able to distribute the load over a wider area," says Rice. "Unfortunately this adds weight, so there's always a necessary compromise."

The size of the gears greatly affects toughness, which is why many reel manufacturers utilize oversize gears for increased power, especially on higher-speed reels.

"Manufacturers today increase the overall diameter of their gears so they can create a high-speed reel with appropriate-size gear teeth to keep durability and muscle in the gears," says Bretza.

A lower gear ratio will always be the most durable when it comes to force and smoothness, but modern manufacturers are finding ways to develop higher-speed reels that still have good amounts of the same attributes.



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NEW PRODUCTS

BY CHRIS WOODWARD / NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2015 / VOL 30 — ISSUE 9



1. STREAMLINED SAFETY

Mustang has introduced two new personal flotation devices for 2016 – one for offshore and one for paddling. The **Elite 38** (above), for offshore fishing and boating, blends light weight and durability with the highest buoyancy rating for commercial PFDs (38 pounds). The outer shell is reinforced with thermoplastic polyurethane abrasion patches. The **Elite 28K** comes with a MOLLE attachment system, commonly used in military applications. The 38 costs \$327.63, and the 28K costs \$301.42.

2. CUTTING CLOSE

Tauten describes its new **LineCutter** as a high-performance tool that's purpose-built to reliably cut high-strength braided line up to 250-pound-test. The cutter comes in two versions – the stainless-steel Limited Edition and the nylon Pro Elite. Both are equipped with a carbide cutting blade and a surgical-grade stainless-steel enclosure. Tauten says the guillotine action of the cutter creates clean tag ends; the product has been tested and validated for 5,000 cuts. The Limited Edition costs \$229, and the Pro Elite costs \$119.



3. PRO WEAR

Smith Optics has re-engineered its 1990s **Guide's Choice** frames (top) and introduced a semirimless **Captain's Choice** (above). Both styles come in four possible colors and offer several Techlite glass and ChromaPop polarized lens options. The wide temples reduce glare, and the Megol nose pads offer a secure fit. Guide's Choice glasses cost \$209 to \$249, and Captain's Choice glasses cost \$219 to \$249.



4. SOUND OFF

As CHIRP sonar continues to evolve, **Airmar Technology Corporation** has developed a line of **single-frequency-band CHIRP transducers**, designed for use with single-band sounders. The nine new transducers include transom-mount and through-hull versions that will be available in many different frequency ranges, such as 95 to 155 kHz, 80 to 100 kHz, 85 to 135 kHz, and 150 to 250 kHz. The new 'ducers will be built with ceramics from the proven dual-band CHIRP line. Prices range from \$1,000 to \$1,500.



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A man wearing a red t-shirt and a wide-brimmed hat is holding a large, silvery fish, likely a salmon, in front of him. He is standing outdoors near a body of water. The fish is held horizontally, showing its full length and silver scales. The man is smiling and looking at the camera. A fishing rod is visible behind him, resting on his shoulder. The background shows a calm body of water under a clear sky.

A second pending length record has been submitted by Chris Wheaton of Fullerton, California, for this **102-centimeter (40-inch) California yellowtail [B]** taken on a jig off Loreto, on the Baja Peninsula, this past June. The current record is 97 centimeters.



From the waters off Tokyo comes a pending all-tackle record for a backbreaking **163-pound, 2-ounce greater amberjack [D]**. Tadashi Yamanaka of Saitama-ken, Japan, fought the beast for 20 minutes after it struck a squid this past June. This marks Japan as a big-amberjack hotbed, since the current world record of 156 pounds, 13 ounces was caught there in 2010.

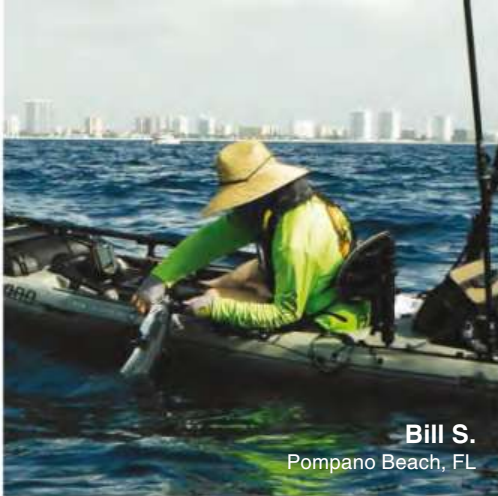


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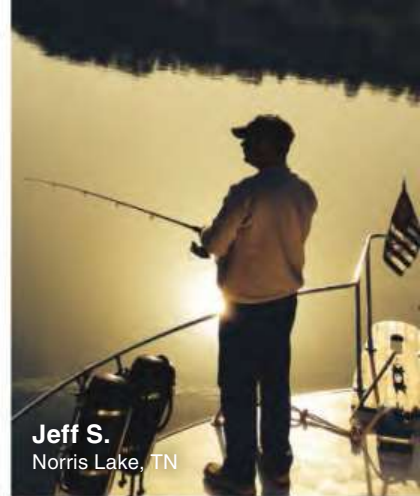




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2016 FIS GEAR PR

SOMETIMES I try to analyze why I love new fishing gear so much. But then I realize the futility: Why ask why? Let's accept this as a force of nature that afflicts all anglers.

At this time of year, the force is strong. Tackle manufacturers debuted new and upgraded products for 2016 at their annual trade show, the International Convention of Allied Sportfishing Trades (ICAST), in July, and as we approach January, more and more of that gear has trickled into the retail chain.

Sport Fishing editors attended this year's ICAST. Here are 27 of the new products we saw, including some of the award winners as well as other new gear we coveted.



EDDYLINE C-135 YAKATTACK EDITION

Eddyline's C-135 YakAttack Edition won ICAST's Best Boat category and the prestigious Best of Show award — the second year in a row that a kayak has won the top honor. The 13-foot-5-inch 'yak features a 34-inch beam and comes in

LIGHTWEIGHT CONSTRUCTION

Versatile Design

two versions: the YakAttack, equipped for fishing, and a basic platform. Both feature the Cloud 10 Seating System and a top-loading GearTrac. The boats weigh 69 pounds and can use a variety

of trolling motors, stakeout poles and other aftermarket accessories. Available in yellow, silver or sea grass, the basic boat costs \$2,199, and the YakAttack costs \$2,599.

FISHING PREMIERE

A ROUNDUP OF
CUTTING-EDGE TACKLE
AND GEAR

BY CHRIS
WOODWARD



**ICAST
WINNER**
OVERALL BEST
OF SHOW



ICAST WINNERS

• **OVERALL BEST OF SHOW:**
Eddyline C-135 YakAttack Edition (kayak)

• **SALTWATER REEL:**
Penn Clash (spinning)

• **SALTWATER ROD:**
St. Croix Avid Inshore

• **HARD LURE:**
Savage Gear Hard Shrimp

• **LINE:**
PowerPro Maxcuatro

• **TERMINAL TACKLE:**
Eagle Claw Lazer Sharp Fillet Knife

• **EYEWEAR:**
Costa Rooster

• **ELECTRONICS:**
Humminbird Helix 7 SI

• **BOATING ACCESSORIES:**
Yeti Hopper 20

For a complete list and full ICAST coverage, visit sportfishingmag.com/ICAST.

REELS

ACCURATE SR-6

Accurate's second-generation SR-6 spinning reels are 10 ounces lighter and come in custom colors that include red, blue, black and gold. The upgraded anodized-aluminum reels also feature new precision CNC-cut gears and a balanced rotor. They offer a max drag of 15 pounds and a gear ratio of 6.1-to-1, with 36 inches of line retrieval per handle revolution. The SR-6 reels hold 280 yards of 15-pound braid, 210 yards of 20, or 160 of 30. The reels cost \$399.

NEW FEATURES

Precision-Cut Gears

DAIWA EXIST

Daiwa's new ultralight Exist spinning reels come with Mag Sealed ball bearings on both sides of the drive gear, and a Mag Sealed main shaft and line roller. They feature Daiwa's patented Zaiion body and air rotor, Digigear digital gear design, and an aluminum body cover. Available in three models for 2- to 12-pound-test, they feature gear ratios of 4.8- and 5.6-to-1 and weigh 5.8 to 8.3 ounces. The reels cost \$699.95 and \$719.95.

SERIOUSLY LIGHT

Mag Sealed, 13 Bearings

OKUMA SOLTERRA SLX

The new Soltterra SLX family of conventional lever-drag reels employs thrust bearings, like Okuma's Makaira models, to deliver power and drag performance in a graphite-framed body. Thrust bearings control side load, reducing the force necessary to crank the handle. The SLX reels also feature a new drag ratchet, stainless-steel main gears and a Carbonite drag system. They come in 11 models and in single- and two-speed versions. Prices range from \$129.99 to \$239.99.

POWERFUL PRECISION

Thrust-Bearing Design

PENN INTERNATIONAL V SILVER

Penn won the ICAST New Product Showcase award for Best Saltwater Reel for its Clash spinner (see "Sneak Preview," July/Aug.). But the company also introduced a new silver version of its iconic gold International reels. Available in the VS (high line capacity, monofilament) and VSX (heavy drags, braided line) series, the silver Internationals are precision-machined from aircraft-grade aluminum, and come with fully machined two-speed stainless gear trains and Penn's Dura-Drag system. From the 12VSX to the 130VSX, the reels cost \$529.95 to \$1,299.95.

NEW COLOR

History Repeated

QUANTUM THROTTLE

Quantum created the Throttle as a one-piece reel rather than a traditional two-piece spinner. The company says this design leads to more precise alignment of gears for smoother, more durable performance. The reel also features a MaxCast II spool, which reduces casting friction by eliminating line contact with the front spool edge. Throttles come in sizes 20 and 30, employ 11 bearings, and offer a 5.2-to-1 gear ratio. Price is \$59.99.

ONE-PIECE BODY

Economical Price



SHIMANO STRADIC FK

Shimano has introduced the Hagane design concept for its new Stradic FK reels. Hagane gears provide power from a cold-forged drive gear, while the body promotes rigidity and impact resistance. Available in five models from 1000 to 5000, the spinners feature 6-to-1 and 6.2-to-1 gear ratios, six shielded ARB bearings, and Shimano's one-way-bearing Power Roller. The 1000 carries 140 yards of 4-pound mono (85 yards of 15-pound braid); the 5000 handles 195 yards of 12-pound mono (200 yards of 30-pound braid). Prices range from \$199.99 to \$229.99.

NEW DESIGN
Cold-Forged

VAN STAAL VR

Van Staal's new VR-series spinning reels feature a fully machined aluminum body with a sealed waterproof drag system, spiral-bevel drive gear and pinion, and a titanium-coated center shaft. (Included with each reel is a custom kit that allows you to convert to a bailless setup.) VR reels are available in four sizes for 20- to 40-pound braid, and feature a 4.8-to-1 gear ratio. Weighing 15.8 to 17 ounces, they cost \$499 to \$589.

WATERPROOF DRAG

Available without Bail

RODS

OKUMA SCT

Okuma says its SCT boat rods combine power with exceptional feel, using two technologies: Unidirectional Fiber Reinforcement and Spiral Carbon Technology. The first blends unidirectional fiber over 24-ton carbon at the tip for lifting strength; the latter reinforces the blank with a double-helix wrap. SCTs come in 13 spinning and casting models measuring from 5 feet 8 inches up to 8 feet. Guides comprise Fuji K-concept frames with Alconite inserts; Okuma uses Fuji and Alps reel seats with EVA and/or tubular carbon-fiber grips. The rods cost \$159.99 to \$399.99.

**FIBER
REINFORCEMENT**
Strength with Finesse

SHIMANO OCEA PLUGGER FLEX LIMITED

Shimano combined its Spiral X and Hi-Power X blank technologies to create five models of Ocea Plugger Flex Limited spinning rods. These two-piece sticks were created for casting the company's Orca pencil baits and poppers to tuna, yellowtail and dorado. Ranging in length from 7 feet 10 inches to 8 feet 6 inches, the rods are rated for 30- to 65-pound braid and 2- to 4.6-ounce lures. All feature Fuji tangle-free SiC K guides and cost \$599.99.

LURE CASTERS

Fast-Loading
Two-Piece

ST. CROIX AVID INSHORE

St. Croix won the Best Saltwater Rod category with its revamped Avid Inshore rod, which uses new blanks, new components and new cosmetics. The metallic seafoam-green SCIII graphite blanks use St. Croix's Integrated Poly Curve tooling technology for continuous curve tapers, increased hoop strength and improved sensitivity. The 22 spinning and casting rods now feature Kigan Master Hand zero-tangle guides with titanium frames, Fuji reel seats and cork handles. Prices range from \$230 to \$290.

WINNING REDO
New Blanks, Guides



TACKLE

RAPALA SCATTER RAP TAIL DANCER

Rapala's Scatter Rap Tail Dancer was built for trolling. It features a tapered tail, an internal rattle and two No. 4 VMC black-nickel round-bend hooks, and runs 11 to 19 feet deep, depending on line size and boat speed. When trolled it moves 5 to 7 feet to either side of the centerline, mimicking a bait trying to escape. The Tail Dancer measures 3½ inches long and weighs 7/16 ounce; it comes in 16 color patterns. The lure costs \$9.99.

ERRATIC TROLLER

Dives, Darts



SAVAGE GEAR HARD SHRIMP

Winner of the ICAST award for Best Hard Lure, Savage Gear's Hard Shrimp offers the durability and castability of a hard lure with the supple leg and antenna action of the award-winning Manic Shrimp soft bait. The Hard Shrimp also features a magnetic hook holder that keeps the hook tight to the bait for shallow-water presentations. On a slow to medium retrieve, the lure darts erratically. On a medium to fast retrieve, the shrimp imparts a walk-the-dog surface action. Available in eight colors, the lure costs \$10.99.

INNOVATIVE DESIGN

Hard, Soft Components



ICAST
WINNER
HARD
LURE

STORM ARASHI TOP WALKER

Available in 4¼- and 5½-inch models, the Top Walker works properly even when retrieved fast. The sides of the bait are a little flatter than most topwater baits, and Storm says that keeps it from rolling as it changes direction. Both sizes come with four internal bearings. The smaller bait (¾ ounce) features three No. 4 VMC black-nickel trebles. The larger bait (1½ ounces) comes with three No. 2 hooks. Both are available in 10 color patterns. They cost \$8.99 to \$9.99.

VERSATILE RETRIEVE

Tracks True



YO-ZURI SURFACE CRUISER

Yo-Zuri's upgraded Surface Cruiser is one of four in the Big Game series, which also includes the Bonita, Bull Popper and Diving Slider. All have been reintroduced for 2016 with improvements and 30 to 50 percent lower pricing. The Surface Cruiser now features Yo-Zuri's color-change technology, Power Body and through-wire construction. It comes in two sizes: 6 inches long and 1½ ounces, and 7½ inches long and 3 ounces. They cost \$17.99 and \$19.99.

IMPROVED ATTRACTANT

Lower Pricing



Z-MAN HEROZ

The 10X-tough HeroZ soft-plastic jerkbait features Z-Man's tear-resistant ElaZtech construction. Extremely buoyant, the 10-inch bait can be fished from top to bottom in the water column. Paired with an 8/0 HeadlockZ HD jig head, the jerkbait can be cast, trolled or jigged for species like cobia, grouper, tarpon, tuna and kingfish. HeroZ comes in nine colors, including nuked pilchard glow, pearl and green lantern (pictured in chartreuse silver). A pack of three costs \$11.99.

ALL DEPTHS

Durable, Buoyant



GEAR

AFTCO SOLMAR

AFTCO's Solmar UV and UVS gloves offer SPF 50 sun protection and synthetic Grotech suede palms with internal CR Smart Foam padding.

ALL-PURPOSE PROTECTION

SPF 50, Padded

Both styles expose the fingertips for ease of knot-tying and added dexterity; the UVS gloves expose the fingers down to the knuckle.

Use the gloves for poling, jigging and popping, and for general fishing use. Available in sizes S to XXL, they cost \$24.95 and \$26.95.



COLUMBIA ULTIMATE CATCH ZERO AND SOLAR DRAG

Columbia has further expanded its women's performance fishing gear lineup with the Ultimate Catch Zero tech shirt, and has added the Solar Drag to its men's line for 2016. The UPF 50 Ultimate Catch Zero features Omni-Freeze

Zero sweat-cooling technology, Omni-Wick evaporation, and venting and perforation to enhance comfort. The Solar Drag weighs only 2.4 ounces and offers Omni-Wick, UPF 50 protection, venting and perforation. Ultimate Catch Zero costs \$80; Solar Drag costs \$70.

COOLING TECH

Men's, Women's Shirts



COSTA KICK PLASTIC

Costa won the ICAST award for Best Eyewear with its Rooster frames (see "New Products," June), but it also showcased its Kick Plastic campaign, launched this year to educate customers about the growing ocean-trash issue, and to encourage them to kick the plastic habit. To further the message, the company created a line of T-shirts made from 50 percent polyester, comprising recycled bottles and plastics, and 50 percent organic cotton. The two designs come in three heathered colors and in sizes S to XXL. They cost \$34.

CONSERVATION MESSAGE

Reduce Trash



YETI TUNDRA 210

Yeti won the ICAST Best Boating Accessory prize with its Hopper 20 (see "New Products," Sept./Oct.), but the company also introduced a new Tundra 210. The 210 is nearly as deep as Yeti's mammoth 420, but has a smaller, cubed footprint designed to fit a truck bed or boat deck. Made from rotomolded polyethylene, the 210 weighs 59 pounds and features FatWall design and extra-thick PermaFrost insulation. The cooler's ColdLock gasket minimizes unwanted air exchange. The 210 also features Yeti's standard hinge, lid-latch and drain technologies. The cooler costs \$799.99.

EFFICIENT SIZE

2-Inch Insulation



EAGLE CLAW SALTWATER FILLET

Eagle Claw won the ICAST Best Terminal Tackle award for its LFK1 and LFK2 fillet knives, 6 and 8 inches respectively, which feature a magnetic sheath and a built-in blade sharpener. The blade is made from stainless steel, and the handle is white-and-blue, slip-resistant thermoplastic rubber. Coarse and fine sharpeners are incorporated into the magnetic sheath, which mounts instantly to metal surfaces. The LFK1 costs \$22.99, and the LFK2 costs \$24.99.

MAGNETIC SHEATH

Integrated Sharpener





GRUNDÉNS BREAKWATER

Long known for its industry-standard foul-weather gear for commercial fishermen, Grundéns has introduced a new line of technical sport-fishing apparel, beginning with the Breakwater Pants. The pants feature quick-dry four-way stretch and stain and water resistance, as well as several new technologies. Grundéns' TidalWeave blends fabrics of different densities and textures without seams, enhancing abrasion resistance while maintaining comfort. The company also integrated its slash-proof SuperFabric into a pliers pocket. Available in dark slate, olive night, monument (gray) and lark (khaki), and in sizes 30 to 40 with three inseam lengths, the pants cost \$89.

CREATIVE TECH

Function, Comfort



CUDA PROFESSIONAL FISHING

Cuda has introduced a new collection of professional fishing knives that includes seven blades, from a 6-inch fillet knife to a 10-inch breaking knife. The knives are constructed from U.S.-made Carpenter Steel that's titanium-bonded for hardness and sharpness. The knives are then layered with a nonstick coating, and the handles are a two-tone plastic laminate. The full-tang knives range in price from \$49.99 to \$94.99.

PRO QUALITY

Seven Blades



HUK KRYPTEK ICON

Huk has partnered with Kryptek camo to offer its patterns in Huk's technical fishing apparel, including the Icon shirt (Neptune pattern pictured). The long-sleeved Icon technical T-shirt offers sun protection and breathability, and features mesh under the arms and along the sides. The poly-knit fabric also resists stains and comes with anti-microbial properties. Available in sizes S through XXXL, the Kryptek Icon costs \$49.99.

NEW CAMO

Protection, Breathability



GARMIN VIRB X AND XE

Waterproof to 50 meters, Garmin's new VIRB X and XE HD action cameras need no external case for underwater shooting. They also feature enhanced video and audio modes and more mounting options than previous models. The X and XE come with multiple built-in sensors and wireless functionality. Both shoot high-definition video (up to 1800p/30fps for X; 1440p/30fps for XE) and 12-megapixel photos at 30fps. The cameras also feature G-Metrix, which lets you track and overlay how fast, far, high and intense your experience truly was. VIRB X costs \$299.99, and XE costs \$399.99.

UNDERWATER USE

Wealth of Capabilities

ICAST
WINNER
ELECTRONICS

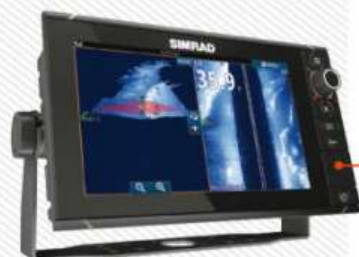


HUMMINBIRD HELIX 7 SI GPS

Winner of the ICAST Electronics category, the Humminbird Helix 7, with a 7-inch display, is big brother to the company's 5-inch versions introduced late last year. The 7 Series comes in five versions, including the top-of-the-line SI GPS (with side imaging, down imaging, traditional sonar, GPS and plotter), a traditional-sonar-only unit, a down-imaging-only unit, a plotter/sounder, and a down-imaging and traditional-sonar unit with a GPS and plotter. The SI GPS offers 100 feet of side-imaging range and 1,500 feet of depth capability. The screen provides 800-by-480-pixel resolution. The series ranges in price from \$399 to \$699.

COMPETITIVELY PRICED

Multiple Models



SIMRAD/LOWRANCE STRUCTURESCAN 3D

With StructureScan 3D, anglers can see fish, structure and bottom contours in high-resolution, 180-degree, three-dimensional clarity on Simrad NSS and NSO evo2 and Lowrance HDS Gen3 multifunction displays. The technology scans 600 feet to port and starboard and up to 300 feet in depth. Anglers can pan, tilt and rotate the display for optimal viewing. SelectScan automatically shades fish-holding zones and suspended targets in a contrasting color. The 3D Waypoint Overlay makes it easy to mark bait schools or structure. Available in December, StructureScan 3D employs a sonar module and Skimmer transducer and costs \$999.

3D SONAR

High-Definition Viewing

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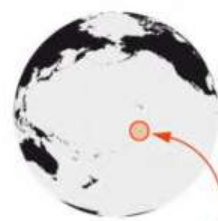


BLUE CHRISTMAS

*THE DEEP, BLUE PACIFIC SURROUNDING CHRISTMAS
ISLAND – KNOWN BEST FOR ITS AMAZING BONEFISH FLATS
– TEEMS WITH BIG WAHOO, YELLOWFIN AND MORE*

BY DAVE VEDDER

© ANDRE SEALE / VWPICS / ALAMY



Christmas Island, more formally known as Kiritimati, is pretty much in the middle of nowhere. Nearly on the equator, this large, raised Pacific coral atoll lies about 1,340 miles south of Honolulu and a bit more than that north of Tahiti. Typical of such atolls, it's characterized by a shallow, sandy interior lagoon and abyssal, deep-blue waters beyond the precipitous outside walls.



THE ALMOST UNBEARABLE ANTICIPATION THAT ALWAYS PLAGUES ME BEFORE A LONG-AWAITED TRIP TO AN EXOTIC ANGLING DESTINATION WAS OVER. NOW WE WATCHED IN AWE AS SCORES OF PORPOISES LEAPED HIGH ABOVE THE INDIGO WATER, AND PERHAPS THOUSANDS OF SEABIRDS RAUCOUSLY DIVE-BOMBED AN IMMENSE PATCH OF SEA LIFE. THE BIRDS WERE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF TENS OF THOUSANDS OF BAITFISH WILLINGLY EMBRACING THE PERILS ABOVE TO ESCAPE THE TOO EVIDENT PERILS BELOW.

My friend Dave Kilhefner, of Portland, Oregon, and I knew that the baitfish's terror had to be caused by a big school of apex predators — likely yellowfin tuna, wahoo or giant trevally (GT). We had no way of knowing at that point and really didn't care which of those magnificent game fishes caused the panic; any of them would make admirable adversaries, and we were eager to engage them in battle.

While such scenes are replayed in many parts of the Pacific, not many anglers realize that the

nearshore waters surrounding Christmas Island, one of the world's largest atolls, hold such a plethora of highly sought-after, trophy saltwater game fish. While Christmas Island is justifiably world-famous for its abundant bonefish and monster GT, most anglers who come here seek those species and miss the thrill of matching wits and strength with the blue-water bruisers that inhabit the waters just beyond the reef line.

YELLOWFIN FRENZY

Kilhefner and I had visited Christmas Island's Ikari House Lodge the previous year. We learned then that amazing blue-water angling can be found here, but we had time only to scratch the surface of the offshore fishing opportunities available. This time, we came prepared with stout casting rods, spinning reels loaded

It's far from uncommon to see huge giant trevally lurking at the edge of blue water along the outside of the atoll. This chap seemed curious to get a better look at the anglers.



DAVE VEDDER, DOUG OLANDER (LEFT)

with 400 yards of 50-pound braided line, and an assortment of poppers, plugs and saltwater flies. We were ready for whatever Christmas Island's blue waters and outer-reef walls had to offer.

Or so we thought.

As we approached the frenzy described above, Kilhefner grabbed a 7-foot spinning rod rated for 25- to 50-pound line, and a large Yo-Zuri Surface Bull GT popper. When we were perhaps 70 yards from the churning mass of sea life, Kilhefner made a prodigious cast, flinging the heavy popper right into the center of the melee.

The instant the 8-inch popper landed, an immense eruption beneath it heralded the attack of a yellowfin tuna. It looked to be a fish of perhaps 50 pounds. Secure in the knowledge that I could safely make a cast without interfering with Kilhefner's fish, which appeared to

“ WE KNEW THAT HUGE WAHOO PROWL THE WATERS NEAR CHRISTMAS ISLAND: THE PREVIOUS YEAR, KILHEFNER HAD LANDED A 99-POUND MONSTER WITHIN 10 MINUTES OF THE SMALL-BOAT HARBOR.

be determined to reach the ocean floor, I made a cast with a similarly ostentatious popper. Surprised that it remained untouched for the first few seconds, I made a huge, sweeping arc with my rod tip, jerking the lure about 3 feet and creating a huge splash. That didn't go unnoticed. Another tuna slammed it, and we were into a

Choppy waters don't deter trophy wahoo or the anglers who seek them (especially since they needn't go more than a few hundred yards from the atoll).





GT can be anywhere at any time, from blue water around the atoll to shallow flats in the lagoon. Don't try this on a 6-weight.

doubleheader within the first few seconds of our Christmas Island adventure.

We knew much bigger yellowfin inhabit the area, and that last summer a local angler had landed a 190-pound-class yellowfin here. But we were both very pleased to have a double happen so quickly.

WILLING WAHOO

While that sort of action is of course not always the case at Christmas Island, similar stories spun by offshore anglers who visit here abound. Yet most anglers remain unaware of Christmas Island's world-class blue-water fishing for yellowfin tuna, wahoo and at times sailfish and dorado. Move closer to the upper edge of the abyssal reef precipice, and expect giant trevally and a plethora of hard-fighting reef dwellers.

A huge bonus for the offshore *pescador*: Blue water can be found within a stone's throw of the beach. The Christmas Island atoll rises

from the depths of the Pacific in an almost vertical climb. In many places, you could drop into depths of 600 feet less than a quarter-mile from the islets atop the reef crest. Just a mile or two offshore, depths of up to 2,000 feet and over are common.

After Kilhefner and I landed our tuna, we scanned the ocean to see where the school had gone, but to no avail; they had disappeared like wisps of fog in the morning sun. We weren't concerned, knowing another school would appear soon enough. So we left two rods rigged with poppers and began trolling, putting out a Braid Marauder and a deep-diving Rapala. Both were rigged with 60-pound braided wire leaders. We had intended to bring 100-pound wire, but somehow left it at home. Our guide doubled the 60-pound wire and hoped it would suffice. We knew that huge wahoo prowl the waters near Christmas Island: The previous year, Kilhefner had landed a 99-pound monster within 10 minutes of the small-boat harbor.

Within minutes, the rod pulling the Marauder began bucking as line peeled off. Kilhefner worked up a fine sweat battling a 30-pound wahoo in the equatorial 90-degree heat. In the next hour we hooked six more wahoo, including a good fish that was inhaled by a huge shark.

Kilhefner decided to see if he could entice a strike on something else. He set his sights on trolling a fly, and rigged his 12-weight rod with a large baitfish-imitation fly. To get the fly down, he used a T-700 extra-fast-sinking fly line.

We soon learned that a fly was not nearly as attractive to wahoo as was the large orange-and-purple Marauder. But that problem was soon solved when what we assumed was an oversize wahoo sliced through our doubled 60-pound-test wire and took our only Marauder with it.

Kilhefner continued to troll his fly for almost an hour more with no sign the wahoo were interested. Then it happened! His 12-weight rod bent at an alarming angle, and his single-action

PLANNING A TRIP

All Christmas Island trips are one week in length, as there is only one flight weekly to Christmas Island. You can depart from Honolulu or Fiji. The Fiji Airways flight makes a circuit between the two areas.

One of the Ikari House guides will meet you at the airport and make the 25-mile drive down most of the length of the island to the lodge, giving passengers a feel for how arid and sparsely populated the island is. Ikari House can accommodate 16 guests. A \$50 fishing license is required, but everything else except alcohol and gratuities is included. The air-conditioned rooms are clean and comfortable. Anglers sleep two to a room. Excellent hot breakfasts and dinners are provided at the lodge, with a heavy emphasis on local delicacies such as lobster, wahoo and tuna. Ample box lunches are sent out with anglers each day.

Anglers are advised to bring a good selection of tackle; there is almost nothing in the way of tackle for sale on the island. If you plan to cast plugs to GTs and tuna, bring an 8- to 10-foot rod capable of casting 5-ounce plugs with reels that can hold 500 yards of 80-pound braid. Don't forget the 100-pound-test wire leader, and bring a selection of Marauders or similar high-speed-trolling hard baits. Fly-fishers should bring 7-, 9- and 12-weight rods, all with floating lines. Be sure to bring several spare lines, as the coral can be very tough on fly lines. The Ikari House website, ikarihouse.com.ki, provides a complete list of suggested tackle. You can reach Ikari House at 808-285-4174, or via email at jacobteem@aol.com





**MOST ANGLERS
REMAIN UNAWARE
OF CHRISTMAS
ISLAND'S WORLD-
CLASS BLUE-WATER
FISHING FOR
YELLOWFIN TUNA,
WAHOO AND AT
TIMES SAILFISH
AND DORADO.**



Bonefish, large and plentiful, remain the primary draw for U.S. anglers like Dave Kilhefner, about to release a trophy bone inside Christmas Island's shallow lagoon.



The rugged coral walls around the atoll and in the passes teem with a variety of game fish, including red bass, an aggressive species of Indo-Pacific snapper.

fly-reel handles spun in a blur. Later, Kilhefner said he had never seen a reel spin that fast. He battled the wahoo on gear that seemed under-matched for the fish's speed and strength, but after five palm-burning runs, he was able to bring it to the gaff. While it wasn't nearly 100 pounds, as was Kilhefner's trophy 'hoo the year before, it still went 40 back at the dock and, on fly tackle, made for a pretty impressive catch.

With that goal accomplished, we decided to try our hand at my all-time favorite type of fishing — tossing large poppers into the surf for GT.

BEASTS OUTSIDE THE REEF

Our skipper ran us to a nearby reef, aptly named Red Rocks, where the surf was crashing all along a half-mile rocky spine that ran parallel to, and about 100 yards from, the beach. This method of fishing is simple but demanding. The angler must toss a huge plug as far as humanly possible, and then retrieve it as fast as humanly possible, while occasionally jerking to cause the lure to erratically slash through the water. Those noisy splashes help convince big GT that the lure is a wildly thrashing, wounded baitfish. Subtle, this kind of fishing is not!

We knew from experience that few people have the stamina to fish poppers under the tropical sun for more than a short time. We decided to take turns of 10 casts each. Kilhefner won the coin toss and was up first.

A very big guy who once played PAC-10 sports, Kilhefner hurled the 6-inch popper so far we almost lost sight of it in the waves. When he made the first jerk, we spotted the splash

made by his plug right at the edge of the breakers. One more hard jerk, and something very big and very aggressive inhaled the plug. Kilhefner set the hook, which was probably not necessary, and the battle was on.

Our guide hollered, "Keep him out of the rocks. It's a huge GT!" Kilhefner put all the strain he could on the giant while our skipper slowly backed the boat away from the reef. Just when we all thought Kilhefner had prevailed, the enormous trevally made one last dash for freedom. The braided line rubbed against a sharp coral ledge. The GT had won the battle.

Often the first few casts will attract the biggest, most aggressive fish on the reef, and that's apparently what happened that day. We continued taking turns casting to likely-looking structure until exhaustion forced us to stop. We ended up with about 20 splashy takes, a dozen or so hookups and

eight to the boat. Several were good-size fish — in the 25- to 60-pound range — but none were nearly as big as the leviathan Kilhefner lost to the rocks.

BIG BONES IN ABUNDANCE

Anglers at Ikari House most often fish the famed flats inside the atoll for bones, bluefin trevally and, oxymoron though it may be, smaller giant trevally, as well as some feisty triggerfish. But we chose to fish outside the reef six of the seven days we were there. Every day we found lots of willing wahoo and GT. Tuna appeared in big numbers some days, only to disappear the next. When we found the big schools of tuna feeding on top, we hooked them easily on topwater plugs.

It seemed almost sacrilegious to visit Christmas Island without fishing the world-famous bonefish flats, so that's what we did on our last day. I admit it was a blast: We each landed more than 25 bones, with a few in the 4- to 6-pound class. We cast to but failed to hook several much larger fish.

Yeah, the flats were a real hoot, but we both agree that when we return, we'll be thinking about a blue Christmas. ☹️

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

For more than 30 years Dave Vedder has followed game fish from Africa to Alaska and from Micronesia to the Amazon, all the while chronicling his adventures for the readers of most of America's outdoor magazines. Now semi-retired, Dave makes only two or three trips a year, but he continues to search out and report on some of the world's finest game-fish destinations.



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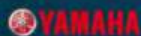
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A large offshore oil rig is positioned in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico. The rig is a complex of steel structures, including a tall derrick and various platforms. It is supported by a large, dark-colored hull. The water is a deep blue, and the sky is a pale, hazy blue. The rig is the central focus of the image, with its reflection visible in the water below.

FREE-FOI AT THE FLOATER

EXPERT STRATEGIES FOR FISHING DEEPWATER RIGS AROUND THE GULF OF MEXICO

BY SAM HUDSON

SAM ROOT/SALTYSHORES.COM

The Gulf of Mexico's scores of floating oil rigs are the ultimate fish-attracting devices. Runs far off the Louisiana coast reward anglers with bountiful tuna, wahoo and marlin catches.



R-ALL

S



B

rian Evans was straining to finish his up-and-down battle with a 45-pound yellowfin tuna when the blue marlin appeared.

Earlier that morning, we had hauled ass in Capt. Kevin Beach's 37-foot Freeman, *Pale Horse*, to the *Sevan Louisiana* drilling rig, almost 75 miles from the mouth of the Mississippi River. Brown, cloudy river water pushed out into the Gulf of Mexico, driving clean blue-green water and pelagics far offshore.

The tuna picked up the first blue runner, dropped back about 20 yards from *Sevan Louisiana*. Evans grabbed the rod and bumped the Shimano Talica 25 lever drag to strike, diverting his speeding tuna's path toward the 2,200-foot depths.

It was game on at the floaters.

LIVE-BAITING BILLFISH

"Marlin! Marlin at the boat!" yelled Beach, as he watched Evans' tuna tiring near the surface. "Must have followed up your tuna!" Beach's enthusiasm was intoxicating, alerting everyone to peer out from the catamaran to watch the 400-plus-pound blue marlin swipe at the hooked tuna.

Beach ran up to the coffin box to grab a fresh blackfin as bait, but deckhand Parker Rodrigue quickly called out and reminded Beach of a lively bonito (little tunny) waiting in a tuna tube. Beach danced back to the cockpit, grabbing a marlin setup loaded with 130-pound PowerPro topped with 100 yards of 80-pound Seaguar fluorocarbon and a 300-pound wind-on leader. He pitched his bait out to the marlin, just behind the triple Yamaha 300s, and hooked up almost immediately.

Angler Jonathan Zucker was ready for the task, outfitted with a fighting belt and back brace. He took the rod and held on as the fish dived deep, never once jumping at the surface. Rodrigue coached and applied cool rags to Zucker as he battled the behemoth billfish; Beach kept on the throttles, positioning the boat favorably. After 50 minutes of stress and anticipation in the shadow of the rig, Zucker reeled the marlin boatside, having fought the fish with 25 pounds of drag during most of the fight. A quick tag and revival, plus a couple of photos, ended with the marlin swimming away strongly.

The entire crew, which included burgeoning angler JoAnne O'Bryant, an offshore-fishing novice, broke into hugs and high-fives. The captain of an oil-industry support ship near *Sevan*



Fighting yellowfin on stand-up gear is the name of the game at the rigs, with the final quarter always being the most tiring.

COURTESY HUK GEAR (LEFT), DANIEL GOEZ (OPPOSITE TOP), SAM HUDSON (OPPOSITE 2)



Positioning on the up-current side of rigs, yellowfin tuna reveal themselves at depths on the sonar or by attacking baits at the surface.

Louisiana called to us on the radio, excited to tell us he saw the entire hookup and battle. “Was that the man with a pointy nose?” he said. “We’ve seen him hanging around the rig for the last couple of days.”

Fishing floater rigs out of Gulf ports such as Venice, Louisiana, has a way of spoiling fishermen. Don’t expect blue marlin every trip — yellowfin and blackfin are much more common — but instead expect the unexpected.

FIXED OR FLOATER

All FADs, or fish-attracting devices, are not the same. The entire Gulf has more than 3,000 fish-attracting devices in the form of oil and natural gas platforms, according to the United States Department of the Interior.

Different inland barges, platforms, rigs and other structures attract different fish species at different depths. In shallower waters, fixed

platforms or towers are prevalent, ranging in depths from just a couple of feet to 1,000 feet. One common type of mobile rig, referred to as a “jackup,” can be found in waters from 90 to 450 feet.

“Once the continental shelf starts to drop out past 1,000 feet, we lose bottomfishing opportunities,” says Capt. Zach Lewis, of the Mexican Gulf Fishing Company (MGFC). “There are just a few rigs along the drop that cater to deep-dropping.”

SIDESHOWS

Besides the chance to fish the floaters for pelagics, the waters off Venice also offer plenty of “sideshow” action. Riding back in from a slow offshore day, or when a specific season is open, such as red snapper, anglers should head for inshore rigs from 100 to 300 feet.

Fishing with Capt. Kevin Beach at one yellow tower in about 270 feet, I watched anglers catch amberjacks on four straight drops, along with a healthy red snapper. One amberjack was likely the largest I’ve seen in person, requiring father-and-son team Frank and Hoss Skapura to both hold the fish. Nearby, a kingfish skyrocketed on hapless baitfish. It was simple fishing, using bottomfishing gear and the blue runners left over from offshore.

Besides rigs, shrimp boats are also available year-round. Depending on the month, the trawler boats will be in different locations, often attracting trailing sport fish. Fishing with Beach, we pulled up bow-to-stern behind an Alabama boat actively hauling its nets. Since the shrimp nets sit low in the water, our boat did not affect the other boat’s fishing.

Beach and his mate Parker started chumming chunks of blue runner and false albacore to pull the fish away from the trawler and toward our boat. With the tunas swirling around our cat, we were able to catch blackfin and small yellowfin using live baits and speed jigs. These same shrimp boats attract yellowfin tuna weighing more than 100 pounds during the fall.





THE TYPE OF FLOATING RIG IS NOT NEARLY AS IMPORTANT AS THE QUALITY OF THE WATER SURROUNDING IT AND THE BAITFISH ATTRACTED TO IT — THESE KEY FEATURES ATTRACT SPECIES LIKE TUNA, WAHOO, AND BLUE AND WHITE MARLIN.

When anglers power out to the deep waters of the Mississippi Canyon, they're liable to fish different types of floater rigs, including spar platforms, tension-leg oil platforms, floating production platforms, semisubmersibles or even drillships. But the type of floating rig is not nearly as important as the quality of the water surrounding it and the baitfish attracted to it — these key features attract species like tuna, wahoo, and blue and white marlin.

Yellowfin tuna are available year-round at the numerous platforms

that dot Gulf waters. Wahoo topping 50 pounds hang along the continental shelf too, preferring blue-water drop-offs, weed lines, seamounts and oil rigs, with the best months from December to March. Blue and white marlin are available in the summer months, especially from May to July. In early fall, whites can school up, allowing for multiple hookups. The blues average 250 to 300 pounds, preferring deep waters that require runs of up to 100 miles.

Beach mentioned that another blue marlin bite can occur from November

to February if he can find 78-degree water temperatures. He uses big blue runners or bonito for bait.

I fished out of Venice, Louisiana, in August 2015 in waters ranging from 1,500 to 2,800 feet. At that time of year, platforms holding yellowfin tuna included *Delta House* (floating production system, or FPS), *Elf* (mini tension-leg platform), *Medusa* (spar platform), *Noble Amos* (semisubmersible), *Who Dat* (floating production unit, or FPU) and *Sevan Louisiana* (semisubmersible). It's unreasonable to list all

the rigs that yield fish, because most can; fishermen must explore the rigs themselves or rely on local reports.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The fall and winter months off Venice are recognized as the best months to fish offshore. Clean water pushes closer to shore, coupled with diminished discharge from the mighty Mississippi River. The largest wahoo and yellowfin each year are caught during this period.

“Fall and winter months also exhibit the most unpredictable, windy weather, limiting the number of days available to fish offshore,” says Lewis, who fishes out of a 39-foot Contender, *Contagious*. “Running all the way out to floater rigs isn’t really necessary.”

Other seasons in the year are completely different. Spring and even summer rains keep Mississippi water levels high, dumping brown fresh water far out into the Gulf. The cloudy waters take over nearshore humps and rigs that might produce pelagics in the winter, forcing captains to run to clear green or blue waters. The rigs themselves are ideal surface structure, attracting bait and sport fish.

“Wind out of the southeast is much more favorable than west winds,” says Capt. Jordan Ellis, who runs a 40-foot Freeman, *ShockWave*, out of Venice Marina. “West winds help push dirty fresh water out into the Gulf and blue

Opposite: Brian Evans fights a yellowfin to the surface when a blue marlin streaks after his tuna. Below: That marlin falls for a live bonito pitched out by Capt. Kevin Beach just moments later.



OFF THE WATER

Home port for me while fishing the floating rigs was Venice Marina in Venice, Louisiana. The town shows little development, with much of the population transient and reliant on the fishing and oil industries. But at Venice Marina you’ll find a thriving mix of captains heading offshore, marsh guides targeting redfish and speckled trout, and commercial fishing boats. Crawgators restaurant sits on the second story, allowing patrons to watch all the offshore boats return to the docks around 5 p.m.

I stayed at the SWC Sportsmans Lodge (southernwaycharters.com), a two-story floating resort that features seven different staterooms with widescreen TVs. A giant lounge is located downstairs near the full kitchen and bar, where anglers meet after the day’s fishing to catch up or watch a golf tournament. Chef and angler Richard Young, along with crewmembers such as Jeremy McHugh, provide everything for guests, including delicious meals of fresh seafood such as tuna, redfish, seatrout and shrimp.

Upstairs is a second great room where one can watch TV or play cards. And since the back porch is directly on the water, each morning your captain is able to pick you up at your doorstep. Venice is a hardcore fishing town, and the Sportsmans Lodge provides serious fishermen with a memorable and hospitable place to stay and play.



water farther offshore.”

After arriving at a floater, check for surface action. Yellowfin and blackfin tuna at times launch from the water, attacking baits at the surface. Have a spinning rod rigged with a disturbance popper like the Shimano Orca. When a tuna attacks while sight-fishing, make sure to feel the weight of the fish first, before setting the hook. Otherwise, you’ll pull the bait away too quickly.

Mixed in with surface yellowfin are often blackfin and little tunny. The bullet bonito are top live bait for marlin, so Beach likes to keep a couple in tuna tubes on his boat. Much closer to the rigs are opportunities to sabiki baitfish such as blue runners, threadfin herring and speedos, though the captains of the MGFC tend to stop at nearshore wrecks first, to catch bait as insurance, before heading out to the floating rigs.

If other fishing boats are at the rig, they’ll be clustered on the up-current side. “The majority of fish are caught there,” says Ellis. “Check for subcurrents too; tuna can orient to different currents in deeper water than what’s showing at the surface.”

Ellis frequently watches his electronics, skipping all the noise at the water’s surface to check for large blips at 100 to 200 feet. “That’s got to be a 500-pound fish,” he said, pointing to an unusually large mark on his Simrad screen. “It might even be a marlin.” Almost simultaneously, an angler fighting a yellowfin tuna had his fish attacked 200 feet down. After a couple of seconds of heavy pressure, the line went slack.

“I guess that answers the mystery,” said Ellis, as he reached out to gaff the head of an estimated 60-pound tuna. “It might have been a tiger shark,” he guessed, counting the distinct teeth marks on the tuna. Not many sharks can turn a 60-pound tuna into a 10-pounder in one clean bite.

PREPARE FOR THE BITE

Each morning before heading out to the floaters, MGFC captains stopped at nearshore rigs to catch baits using sabiki rigs. Sometimes the structure was the actual rig; other times it was giant anchor buoys near platforms on which barges moor. Beach looked for blue runners that measured from his thumb to the tip of his index finger, with his hand held as if shooting a gun.



Small hardtails (blue runners) are favored over larger ones.

Ellis really drove that point home, heading out to open water along tide-lines to catch jumbo threadfin herring in schools. “The time of year truly dictates what the tuna are eating,” he says. “There are times when you can mark tuna deep at the rigs, but they won’t touch a bait.” The day I fished with Ellis, most of our fish were hooked on herring, while the blue runners (hardtails) were not as successful.

Ellis believes it’s vital to utilize the seasonal bait available in the area he expects to fish. Threadfin herring are common from July to September. From October to November, large mullet invade area waters.

“Those big tuna that we catch in the fall feed on the large mullet,” he says. “They’ll head closer to shore to follow the mullet and get sidetracked at the shrimp boats where anglers target them. I’ve caught yellowfin in 60 feet of water behind shrimp boats.”

Menhaden are prime bait from December to April, with hardtails available most of the year, except for the cold months when only the largest specimens hang around.

For tuna tackle, Lewis uses Shimano Talica 25s spooled with 80-pound braid, connected to 100 yards of 60- to 80-pound Seaguar fluorocarbon, terminating with a snelled Mustad 6/0 3X circle hook. “The leader starts



Clockwise from left: Blue runners (hardtails), about 6 inches long, are a top baitfish for tuna in the summer months. Shimano Orca topwaters receive plenty of punishment if tuna are feeding on top. Combining rubber band and sinker helps get baits down in the water column when tuna won’t strike a slow-trolled presentation at the surface.

at 100 yards, but it shortens quickly over time as we catch fish, cut off frays and rerig hooks,” he says. Lewis deploys a single bait on each outrigger, with a third bait fished deeper using a weight and rubber band.

Paired with the Shimano setups is

another vital tool — the fighting belt. Don’t let your friends call you a wimp when you opt for a belt; this piece of gear is critical for hard-fighting tuna.

I’m no tuna pro, but I realized quickly that I could land tuna up to 60 to 70 pounds using a Cush-it soft cover over the gimbal to protect my body. Anything larger, and I went straight to an AFTCO fighting belt. The belt handles the setup and fight better, and allows anglers to apply more pressure. For a prolonged fight with a heavier fish, add a back harness that connects to the reel mounts. The harness takes much of the sting out of your lower back. No matter the angler’s fitness, pumping and reeling a big tuna will tire your body, and these tools can help shorten the fight time.

Modest Mouse singer Isaac Brock wasn’t alluding to offshore fishing when he penned the song “Float On,” but many offshore captains in the northern Gulf take that motto seriously each day when they head offshore. 🐟

Floater rigs are secured in place via temporary methods, partly because of the depths in which they operate. The different types of floater rig platforms, including the columns and pontoons they’re built on, make up the fish-attracting surface structure.

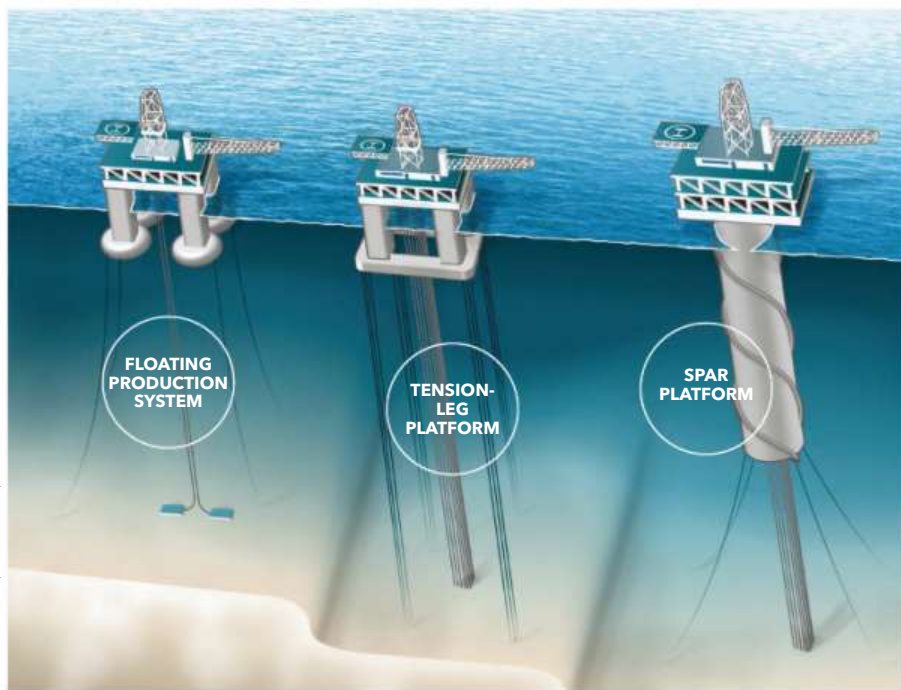


ILLUSTRATION: KEVIN HAND, PHOTOS: SAM HUDSON (OPPOSITE, ABOVE FAR RIGHT, 2), DOUG OLANDER (ABOVE RIGHT)

Taking notice: To many game fish, like snook, a lure's frantic darting and sudden stopping seem to signal, "Easy meal!"





THE WICKED TWITCH

HOW TO USE THE VENERABLE JERK-AND-PAUSE RETRIEVE
TO TURN ON THE STRIKE RESPONSE IN PREDATORS

BY DOUG OLANDER

W

hat is a jerkbait? That's not a term you'll find at dictionary.com. In fact, I'm not sure there is any standard definition. But here's my take: Any lure that an angler retrieves with repeated jerks and pauses is a de facto jerkbait (aka twitchbait).

Some lures work better for this purpose than others. Which those might be, as well as the fine points of wickedly effective twitch-and-pause retrieves and what makes such retrieves so productive, is all part of the focus of this feature.

For the sake of full disclosure, I'll say up front that I love this kind of fishing. It keeps me on edge: With every stop or start of a lure, I'm watching for that smashing strike, and I genuinely believe that not much gets a predator fired up like the sudden flash of a hard-twitched crankbait. (And while soft jerkbaits abound, in this feature we're focusing on crankbaits — hard lures.)

Capt. Kevin Merritt of Naples, Florida, is also a believer. He points to a trip where he found snook "off a grassy beach, stacked on an eddy, feeding on jumbo glass minnows." His anglers could see the fish clearly, and after many casts with topwaters to no avail, some tried casting Rapala X-Raps up-current and retrieving with an erratic jerk-and-pause. "We were able to draw strikes from spooky snook in that ultra-clear water," Merritt says, though nothing else had seemed to work.

The same sort of approach is deadly on "snook Down Under," or barramundi, says expert Steve Starling, one of Australia's most prolific fishing writers. "Almost every memorable cast-and-retrieve session I've had on barramundi has involved that technique. I've seen it turn a shut-down bite into a frenzy more times than I can count," he says. "Real maestros of the jerk-and-pause can keep a lure flashing, jinking, shimmying and dancing in a small area for minutes at a time. It can be a deadly strategy."

Perhaps the best-known lure maker in the world, Patrick Sebile has fished his lures and others all over the globe. "I've truly found that the jerk-and-pause retrieve is effective

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JERKBAITS
CAPITALIZE
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for almost every species of fish," Sebile says. "It works in almost all circumstances."

WHY IT WORKS

To better understand the fine points of jerk-and-pause (J&P) fishing, I solicited opinions from a variety of experts around the United States and beyond. What about this style of fishing lures, I wondered, should make it so effective?

Just think of how a wounded herring darts, stops and darts, says Ray Waldner, a professor of biology at Florida's Palm Beach Atlantic University and a longtime *Sport Fishing* Fish Facts expert. "Injured baitfish swim in a very erratic manner, which attracts the attention of predators."

"There's a simple fact in nature and the world of fish survival," says Capt. Jack Sprengel, who fishes the Northeast for stripers, weakfish and offshore game fish. "Don't

stand out and don't fall behind! Jerkbait capitalizes on these principles, giving predators an easy choice."

Taking a somewhat different tack, Larry Dahlberg, host of the TV show *The Hunt for Big Fish*, maintains that the erratic retrieve doesn't so much mimic wounded prey as simply

Capt. Jack Sprengel is a fan of twitch lures; this big striper taken on a Shimano Orca offers a pretty good idea of why that's so.



HOOK SWAP

While it's often best to swap out hooks for stronger trebles or singles, be cautious in general about hooks that are larger or much heavier than those provided, as the lure's action could suffer.

On the other hand, some pros, like Halco's Tim Carter, a Perth, Australia, native, actually want heavier hooks at times, to make a buoyant lure suspend or a suspending lure sink. Carter says he typically prefers a lure that ascends and wobbles a bit during the pause, but if casting to fish holding deep near structure, a lure that sinks on the pause may offer the best results.

Pacific cubera love
hard-twitched lures like
this Sebile Stick Shadd.
Apparently in its youth,
this snapper swam head-
first into a large rock.



JERKBAIT HARD LURES: A SAMPLER

WHEN ASKED TO NAME one or two of their top jerkbait hard lures, manufacturers suggested what you see here. They vary considerably in size, but all should produce an effective darting action with a J&P retrieve. Some are sold with thin freshwater hooks; they'll produce well in salt water, but of course changing out hooks would be important. Prices listed were derived as noted (TD = tackledirect.com).

ALMOST ALIVE
MINNOW
HARD BAIT



LENGTH: 3¾ inches
WEIGHT: 0.3 ounce
COLORS: Four
BUOYANCY: Suspending
SWIMMING DEPTH: 4 inches
COST: \$4.99 (manufacturer)

BOMBER
HEAVY-DUTY
LONG A



LENGTH: 6 inches
WEIGHT: 7/8 ounce
COLORS: 26
BUOYANCY: Floating
SWIMMING DEPTH: 2 to 3 feet
COST: \$8.99 (TD)

BOMBER
BADONK-A-DONK SS



LENGTH: 3½ inches
WEIGHT: ½ ounce
COLORS: 18
BUOYANCY: Slow-sinking
SWIMMING DEPTH: Varies per retrieve
COST: \$8.99 (manufacturer)

DAIWA
SALT PRO
MINNOW BULLET



LENGTH: 6 inches
WEIGHT: 1½ and 2½ ounces
COLORS: 13
BUOYANCY: Sinking and fast-sinking
SWIMMING DEPTH: From “zero feet to the bottom”
COST: \$15.95 and \$16.95 (TD)

HALCO
HAMMA 85



LENGTH: 85 millimeters (3.3 inches)
WEIGHT: 11 grams (0.4 ounce)
COLORS: 10
BUOYANCY: Suspending
SWIMMING DEPTH: 3 and 9 feet, depending on interchangeable bib (lip) size
COST: \$9.99 (manufacturer)

HALCO
LASER PRO 120



LENGTH: 118 millimeters (4.6 inches)
WEIGHT: 20 grams (0.7 ounce)
COLORS: 16
BUOYANCY: Floating
SWIMMING DEPTH: 3 and 7½ feet, depending on bib (lip) size
COST: \$15.99 (Melton)

MIRROLURE
CATCH 2000



LENGTH: 3 1/2 inches
WEIGHT: 1/2 ounce
COLORS: 23
BUOYANCY: Suspending
SWIMMING DEPTH: To 2 feet
COST: \$8.99 (TD)

MIRROLURE
MIRRODINE BG SERIES



LENGTH: 2 5/8 inches
WEIGHT: 3/8 ounce
COLORS: 10
BUOYANCY: Suspending
SWIMMING DEPTH: To 2 feet
COST: \$8.49 (TD)

RAPALA
SHADOW RAP



LENGTH: 4 3/8 inches
WEIGHT: 7/16 ounce
COLORS: 14
BUOYANCY: Slow-sinking
SWIMMING DEPTH: 2 to 4 feet
COST: \$8.99 (TD)

RAPALA
X-RAP
SALTWATER 12*



LENGTH: 4 3/4 inches
WEIGHT: 3/4 ounce
COLORS: 8
BUOYANCY: Suspending
SWIMMING DEPTH: 4 to 8 feet
COST: \$12.49 (TD)

SHIMANO
ORCA SINKING
PENCIL



LENGTH: 140 millimeters (5 1/2 inches)
WEIGHT: 2 ounces
COLORS: 8
BUOYANCY: Sinking
SWIMMING DEPTH: Not listed
COST: \$25.99 (TD)

STORM
TWITCH STICK



LENGTH: 4 inches
WEIGHT: 5/8 ounce
COLORS: 17
BUOYANCY: Suspending
SWIMMING DEPTH: 3 to 5 feet
COST: \$6.99 (TD)

YO-ZURI
3DB JERKBAIT



LENGTH: 3 1/2 inches
WEIGHT: 3/8 ounce
COLORS: 18
BUOYANCY: Suspending
SWIMMING DEPTH: To 3 feet
COST: \$9.99 (other)

YO-ZURI
CRYSTAL 3D MINNOW



LENGTH: 4 3/8 inches
WEIGHT: 9/16 ounce
COLORS: 16
BUOYANCY: Sinking**
SWIMMING DEPTH: To 6 feet
COST: \$14.99 (TD)

*Freshwater version pictured.

**Also available in suspending and floating models.



Many styles of lures, whether lipped or lipless (like the Strike Pro Buster Jerk that took this bluefin trevally), can be twitched effectively.

frantically escaping prey. “One of the key triggers, if not *the* key trigger, is making the lure act as though it thinks something is after it,” he says. A steady retrieve, on the other hand, doesn’t make a lure seem as if it’s being chased.

Sebile believes a J&P retrieve can also trigger a response in a predator not actively feeding. Besides offering the visual flash, the lure suggests a wounded fish — and hence an easy meal.

Many of these J&P pros agree with Capt. Matt Tusa, who fishes the coastal waters of western

Mississippi, that ultimately this retrieve also offers the advantage of keeping the lure in the strike zone longer.

WHICH LURES TO TWITCH?

Which style of lures offers the best performance with a J&P retrieve?

Australian Jim Harnwell says most lures featuring “long, slender designs and fairly small lips” that run shallow work well as twitchbaits.

His countryman Starling agrees, and cites one lure — as did other pros interviewed for this feature — that has for decades exemplified the jerkbait plug: the venerable Bomber Long A. One Long A attribute Starling notes is that it floats at rest, so it ascends during pauses — which is when he looks for most strikes.

Merritt likes J&P lures that suspend, as they allow an angler to better control the depth at which his lures are working — and, he says, faster sinkers are better fished in deeper water.

As Sebile points out, many crankbaits may have been designed without any sort of J&P retrieve in mind, yet can be superb lures for this technique.

One case in point: Shimano’s suspending Waxwing, designed specifically for a steady retrieve. Yet Sprengel says of the Waxwing, “A single sweep of the rod, followed by a pause, has proven to be one of the most effective presentations I’ve ever seen.”

Whatever the lure, many J&P pros cite flashy finishes as best, since, after all, the jerky retrieve is designed to get fish’s attention.

WHEN IT WORKS

Merritt offers the example of snook in mangroves as an ideal scenario for a J&P retrieve, as it gives the lure more time in the critical strike zone, near the mangroves, to allow a snook to see and attack without going far from the safety of mangrove roots.

Harnwell cites much the same strategy when fishing around snags in Australia, where “fish

HOW’S YOUR LINE LAY?

If you throw really light lures with thin braided lines, and then work them back with a jerk-and-pause retrieve, you’re likely to often hear one of fishing’s most dreaded sounds: the chaotic tangle of a wind knot whacking out the guides.

The pause in your retrieve allows for loose loops around the spool, which on the next cast turn into monsters.

J&P fishing is particularly productive but demands constant vigilance with braid, and often that isn’t enough. I’ve concluded that one’s spinning reel plays a huge part in this problem. I realized as much when I started fishing Shimano’s Stradic CI4+ in a 2500 model, filled all the way with 12-pound braid. I almost couldn’t buy a wind knot. In many months of fishing that reel with very light lures and J&P retrieves that entail lots of slack line each jerk, I’ve got very, very few wind knots. Why? Somehow, clearly, in the reel’s design and operation, it picks up line and lays it in coils tight enough to prevent the loose loops that make much mischief on the next throw.

This isn’t an ad for Shimano, and I don’t doubt there are other brands of small spinning reels that will do the job — but in truth, most I have used don’t. Unfortunately, there’s no way to know how well a reel will lay down line except through trial and (d’oh!) error.

won't move too far from cover, so the key is to keep a lure twitching and pausing but not actually moving out very far."

Florida-based Capt. Jim Ross likes a J&P retrieve around structure such as mangroves, rock jetties and docks because "it keeps the bait in the strike zone near the structure for a long period of time," more than would a straight retrieve.

Capt. Richie Gaines, who fishes Chesapeake Bay, likes J&P as a go-to retrieve when casting to striped bass in water that's clear, fairly shallow and cool. "I suspect that when the water is on the cooler side," he says, "the stripers aren't fired up or in the mood to aggressively chase bait. The twitch-and-pause technique is perfect for these conditions, with the flash and vibration of the twitch attracting attention, and the lure just sitting there on the pause so it looks like an easy meal."

Farther north, New York striper guide Capt. John Luchka reiterates the theme of J&P for bass in the spring, when "they're pretty lethargic after a long winter." Particularly when not fished too fast, he says, the jerk-and-pause will often trigger a reaction bite.

Ross modifies his retrieve according to season and water temperatures in the same way most pros seem to — i.e., the warmer the water, the faster and harder the J&P, and vice versa. Tournament-winning pro Bernie Schultz, based in Florida, echoes that view: "The warmer the water, the more action and pauses." Of course, the opposite is also true, Schultz says, noting that in the Southeast, cold snaps can kill or impair smaller fish, and during such times, predators may see a slowly twitched crankbait as easy pickin's. On the other hand, beware of pauses too long if the fish are fairly active. "That might give fish time to decide the offering just doesn't look right," advises Waldner.

TWITCHING'S FINE POINTS

How do J&P experts work their crankbaits back to the boat?

"It's all about rod-tip action," advises Starling of the crucial twitch part of the retrieve.

From my own experience, I agree, but would say it's often all about picking up the slack. I find that many lures offer the most effectively erratic wobbles when, at the end of each jerk, I leave

slack line on the water. Thus each twitch begins with picking up slack and whipping the lure in a quick, sharp motion. One caution, particularly when using light lures with braided line, is the dreaded wind knot that can form while doing this. (See the opposite sidebar, "How's Your Line Lay?")

Of course, when casting to speedy, schooling species, such nuances fall by the wayside, when we're talking about a full-on, take-no-prisoners hard jerk and quick pause. In fact, I prefer heavy, fast-sinking lures such as Shimano's Orca Pencil, the Daiwa SP Minnow Bullet and Sebile's Stick Shadds (no longer available in a saltwater series but, I am told, to be part of a new lineup for 2017) when using heavy gear with a hard and fast retrieve; lighter lures would end up at the surface, when more often I want to keep them several feet down.

But there are times when working them on top can be dynamite, Dahlberg says: "I work my minnow lures erratically all the time, but with floating minnows I like to give them a couple of snaps to 'woof' the surface and make bubbles and commotion at the beginning of the retrieve." Sometimes, he adds, he might stop partway through the retrieve to do it again.

"We've all had fish following a lure, then slow down and leave. As all experienced anglers know, the best way to get a fish to commit is to try and take the lure away by speeding up or changing direction."

Sebile adjusts his J&P retrieve based on the behavior of his target species. If they're not actively feeding, he'll "go slow, with soft twitches and long pauses." When predators are feeding actively, Sebile speeds up his retrieve with quicker, harder twitches. Sometimes he'll combine his approach — as with cubera snapper, for example, when he fishes a Stick Shadd with fast, hard jerks but long pauses between.

Luchka points out that when casting to schools of baitfish, one should cast just to the edge, where the J&P retrieve will suggest a wounded fish (again, that easy meal).

Finally, take a moment to watch a lure near the boat and note how it's working when you twitch it. Dahlberg says, "When checking out a new lure, I always put it through its paces by checking both the slowest and fastest retrieve it will operate, and what it does when I give it a short slack-snap-slack jerk. In clear water, *the lure will tell you what to do.*" 🐟



Many twitchbaits are suspending (neutrally buoyant) or slow-sinking. Those that sink faster, such as this Shimano Orca Pencil, encourage a faster, harder jerk-and-pause retrieve.

EXPERTS CONTRIBUTING TO THIS FEATURE

Tim Carter (Perth, Australia)
Halco Lures, halcotackle.com

Larry Dahlberg
(Taylor Falls, Minnesota)
The Hunt for Big Fish,
huntforbigfish.com

Capt. Richie Gaines
(Queenstown, Maryland)
Angler's Connection
Guide Service,
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Jim Harnwell (Sydney, Australia) Publisher of
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Long Run Fishing Charters,
longrunfishingcharters.com

Capt. Kevin Merritt
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Backcountry Fishing, naplesbackcountryfishing.com

Capt. Jim Ross
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Bernie Schultz
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Patrick Sebile
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Lure designer, sebile.com

Capt. Jack Sprengel
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Steve Starling
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Fishing journalist,
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Capt. Matt Tusa
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Shore Thing Fishing Charters,
shorethingcharters.com

Dr. Ray Waldner
(Palm Beach, Florida) Palm
Beach Atlantic University,
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FISHING MACHINES FISH TRIALS BOAT TIPS ELECTRONICS NEW BOATS & GEAR BETTER BOATING

SF BOATS

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2015 / VOL. 30 — ISSUE 9



SCOUT BOATS SPOTLIGHT

SCOUT 420 LXF

Scout Boats builds smartly finished center- and dual-console fishing boats out of Summerville, South Carolina. Company founder Steve Potts started making small boats as a teenager working in an outboard-motor dealership.

INSIDE:



Fishing Machines:
HydraSports Custom 5300 Sueños

70



Electronics:
Symphony at Sea

86



Better Boating:
Over the Bar

92



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BY CHRIS WOODWARD AND JIM HENDRICKS

50 FEET AND COUNTING

What Does It Take to Build the World's Largest
Outboard-Powered Center-Console?



LIKE THE DIZZYING GRAND CANYON or the soaring Sears Tower, the HydraSports Custom 5300 Sueños defines “immense,” at least in the world of center-consoles.

On the factory floor, the 53-foot hull dwarfs three engineers who clamber over the stout stringer system, inspecting miles and miles of cable and wire. On the water, it makes other CCs look like tenders.

Its list of features and capacities — 1,000 gallons of fuel, 400 gallons of fish boxes, 100 square feet of cockpit — reads like the brochure for an offshore battlewagon. In fact, this enormous yet graceful vessel carries a Structural Composites MIL-TOUGH rating; its pedigree began with a Navy design.

To appreciate just how big and how spacious a 53-foot center-console can be, we spent time in the factory and on the water with HydraSports Custom and several of its new flagship hulls. We want to carry you along on that ride.

DREAM BIG

Unveiled in February at the Miami International Boat Show (where it won an Innovation Award), the 5300 Sueños gained immediate acclaim with its

quad Seven Marine 557s. As the largest outboard-powered center-console boat built to date, it represents the culmination of a dream (*sueño* means just that in Spanish) for HydraSports Custom CEO Elias De La Torre III, who is an

PERFORMANCE

POWERFour Yamaha F350s
LOAD350 gal. fuel, six crew, full tower
TOP SPEED50.1 mph @ 5,800 rpm
TIME TO 30 MPH8 sec.
BEST MPG0.6 @ 21 mph (3,000 rpm)

HULL

LOA52 ft. 11 in.
BEAM13 ft.
DEADRISE23 deg.
WEIGHT28,323 lb. (dry w/ four Seven 557s)
DRAFT3 ft. (motors up)
FUEL1,000 gal.
MAX POWERUnlimited
 (options include quad Yamaha F350s, quad Seven Marine 627s, quad Mercury 400s)

MSRP Price on request, based on custom power and features

HYDRASPORTS CUSTOM

Islamorada, Florida

800-635-3186

hydrasports.com

avid boating angler.

“The idea was to not only go big, but to do so with a boat that offers great fishing features, performance, family comfort and the opportunity to customize,” says De La Torre.

Fulfilling that dream would not be easy, says company president Alex Leva. “We wanted to build on the success of the 4200 Siesta,” he explains. “But if we simply scaled up to a 53-footer, it would have been way too heavy.”

Built traditionally, a 53-foot center-console would have weighed at least 40,000 pounds. The vessel’s current dry weight with quad 557s is 28,323 pounds — impressive, particularly compared with the 4200, which weighs

23,000 pounds, powered by quad Yamaha F350s.

Leva’s weight-loss solution came in the form of a complex and labor-intensive system known as Compsys, employed previously in the construction of high-performance military vessels. “I know a guy who designs those [Navy vessels],” says Leva. “I asked him if the Navy would let us do what they do. He called back and told me the Navy said we could have all their tech.”

The 5300’s design employs a thinner fiberglass hull bottom than traditional builds, but a much denser stringer grid. Leva likens the stringer design to a skeleton with a vertebral column. To the casual observer, it looks a bit like a mega hopscotch grid.

Foam stringers, ribs and bulkheads blanket the hull surface, leaving no open space measuring greater than 11 inches (including overlay). The stringers and bulkheads number almost 60.

HydraSports Custom then used carbon-fiber materials and vinylester resins to strengthen the skeletal frame.

Also designed from scratch, the single-step running surface and aft pad deliver a performance vessel with what Leva calls “automatic transmission” — the boat doesn’t need constant tab adjustment and features no appreciable

“ THE IDEA WAS TO NOT ONLY GO BIG, BUT TO DO SO WITH A BOAT THAT OFFERS GREAT FISHING FEATURES, PERFORMANCE, FAMILY COMFORT AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO CUSTOMIZE.

bow rise. “Speed is important, but not blistering speed,” he says. “We’re like a Mercedes touring car. We want range and fishing capability.”

The first full-scale model was literally built from a block of foam. “Then we lived on it,” he says. “We wanted to see if we could open the console door and not hit the gunwale. We wanted to see if we could pick up a piece of soap in the shower. Then we could shave the foam, and cover it in glass to create the plug.”

The HydraSports Custom dream officially became real this year, and *Sport Fishing* fished aboard first. In early September, we met our captains and a team from the company in Islamorada, Florida. We fished a 53 with quad Yamaha F350s and took a brief ride aboard a prototype version powered by quad Seven Marine 627s.

Below: The intricate Compsys stringer system (and the enormous length) of the 53 is evident in this factory image. Right: An overhead crane lowers the deck onto the hull to assess fit. A ring will complete the three-piece build.



BLACKFIN BLITZ

“Frigates on the deck! Hang on! Quarter-mile!” With that warning, co-skipper Tyler Coffman punched the throttles from the tower station. The outboard quartet vaulted the super-size center-console to eye-watering speed. Within seconds we slid into the action as blackfin tuna blew up off the starboard side.

In the huge cockpit, Capt. Josh Squire scooped a netful of cigar minnows from one of the two 60-gallon transom livewells, and tossed the bait to the foaming tuna as a trio of anglers cast toward the action. Three rods arched over and drags screamed in unison, announcing a triple hookup on 20-pound-class blackfins.

The single-level deck allowed our crew to easily make their way around while fighting tuna. Recessed powder-coated aluminum bow rails offered security. Our test boat also featured cushioned, stain-resistant SeaDek nonskid in a teak pattern.

We also found plenty of gunwale rod holders, including 11 along each side and seven across the transom. This is in addition to under-gunwale stowage and rod holders across the aft portion of the powder-coated aluminum hardtop frame. A tackle station abaft the helm deck’s second bench seat gives anglers a place to rig lines and baits, with plenty of drawers to stow tackle and other gear. The station on our tester was also rigged with a drawer-style fridge.

Twenty-nine-inch-wide walkways aside the seating module and console offered easy access forward and aft. The aft cockpit — measuring 11 feet 4 inches wide by 8 feet long — provided plenty



of room for five anglers to fish at one time. Coaming bolsters encircling the interior cushion knees and thighs at the rail. At the transom, 2-foot-4-inch-tall gunwales seemed the ideal height for battling fish.

We kept our catch in one of two

200-gallon fish boxes flanking the aft cockpit sole. These featured 12-volt chiller plates that minimize the need for ice. Leva pointed out that all the latching hatches on the 5300 are actually Frigid Rigid boxes with super-thick insulation.



Far left: Inward-opening doors on each side of the cockpit make it easy to land or release fish and to load or unload the boat. Left: The twin 60-gallon pressurized livewells in the transom are fed by Rule 2000 pumps and feature a unique overflow-scupper design.

SCOTT SALYERS (ABOVE)



Left: Our smiling crew with a brace of 20-pound-class blackfin tuna. Top: Co-skipper Tyler Coffman lowers a netful of bait directly into one of the livewells. Above: Acrylic windows allow you to monitor bait health and number.

Along the bottoms of the gunwales amidships is room for adding one or more Frigid Rigid coolers on each side of the interior. These not only increase cold storage, but create toe rails to brace yourself in rough seas.

EASY TO USE

The 5300 also plays host to numerous practical innovations that make it user-friendly for anglers. Earlier in the morning, as Coffman lifted a cast net of wriggling baits inside the boat, Leva pointed to the design of the twin transom livewells. “We made the openings big enough so that you can drop a cast net inside to shake out the bait, rather than using a five-gallon bucket,” he explained. Friction hinges hold the

covers to the wells open, eliminating the need for gas-strut supports that might snag a net.

Fed by Rule 2000 pumps inside air-purging sea chests (which include backup pumps in case the primaries fail), the wells become pressurized when you close gasketed covers to eliminate sloshing that can injure bait. To control overflow, uniquely designed (patent pending) scuppers along the aft rim of each well channel any excess water overboard.

Acrylic windows wrap around the radius of each well, letting you keep a watchful eye on your liveys from just about any angle.

As Squire lowered the anchor, Leva pointed out the patented design of the anchor locker. Rather than using an in-stem roller, HydraSports Custom has placed the roller just under the hatch for the anchor locker, along with a vertical windlass and a pull-up cleat for tying off the rode.

HydraSports Custom made sure to address passenger comfort with multiple lounging options at the bow.

“This lets the skipper actually see from the helm that the anchor is properly secured,” Leva explained. “It also eliminates a hole in the bow where water can pour in while underway.”

Dual inward-opening “docking doors” — one on each side of the cockpit — make it easy to land gaffed fish or carry gear and supplies aboard, regardless of how you tie up.

To make docking such a super-size boat easier, HydraSports combined a Lewmar bow thruster with Yamaha’s Helm Master system (which includes a joystick control) to allow for precise low-speed maneuvering.

FAMILY COMFORT

One of CEO De La Torre’s primary considerations is making sure everyone stays comfortable while fishing aboard the 5300. That starts with a smooth ride, made possible by a 60-degree entry to knife through seas, an exaggerated Carolina flare to toss spray aside, and 23 degrees of deadrise at the transom.

Our run offshore was so pleasant that we were able to enjoy the two-person 4-foot-wide lounge seat with





Four Seven Marine 627 outboards look right at home on this 53, a prototype we briefly ran that will display at the Fort Lauderdale Boat Show.

fold-down armrests, on the forward portion of the center console, and the 8½-foot-long bow loungers with angled backrests.

From the deck between the bow loungers, a motorized platform rises on twin pedestals to form (with a filler cushion) a huge forward sun pad. Or you can raise the platform higher to create an inviting dining area.

For helm seating, you have six choices — two rows of three very comfortable perches — all shaded by the 5300's hardtop. HydraSports calls the 5-foot-wide second row a "sleigh seat."

Bucket seats with shock-absorbing seat pedestals, fold-down armrests and flip-up bolsters in the first row feature two tiers of footrests on the console and individual fold-down footrests at the base of each seat. The two outside seats swivel outward and aft.

HydraSports uses four levels of foam thickness in its lounge seating. "You want soft foam for the seat portion, but firmer material for the backrests and even firmer foam for the headrests for

maximum comfort," Leva explained.

The helmsman sits front and center, allowing him to easily reach the three Garmin 8500 touch-screen displays that fill the 64-inch-wide helm panel, as well as the rocker-switch panels on each side of the central wheel.

The helm panel fastens with two compression latches to the console. When you want access to rigging, the panel hinges aft. "We want to make it easy to get to all of the systems on the boat without need for a box full of tools," Leva said.

Thanks to the elevated bridge deck and consistently level trim (even during acceleration), forward vision from



Six helm seats offer plenty of room and cushioning. HydraSports Custom calls the second row a "sleigh seat."

“YOU WANT SOFT FOAM FOR THE SEAT PORTION, BUT FIRMER FOAM FOR THE BACKRESTS AND EVEN FIRMER FOAM FOR THE HEADRESTS FOR MAXIMUM COMFORT.”

the helm proved outstanding during our fishing trip. Enhancing the field of view are patented tempered-glass console side windows that eliminate any distortion.

The air-conditioned cabin within the 5300's center console boasts 6 feet 5 inches of headroom, with a galley featuring ebony wood-veneer cabinets and a Corian counter with a glass-bowl sink and fresh-water faucet; an enclosed head compartment with a vanity, porcelain toilet and shower; and a berth that converts to a dinette or cabin seating.

BY THE NUMBERS

So how did this big center-console perform? To find out, we gathered our data with six crew, 350 gallons of fuel and 120 gallons of water in the livewells.

This full-tower Sport Fish Edition, powered by four Yamaha F350 outboards, turned Yamaha Saltwater Series II 17-pitch, three-blade stainless-steel propellers. From idle, the 5300 jumped to plane in four seconds, reaching 30 mph in eight seconds, en route to a top speed of 50.1 mph at 5,800 rpm, where the outboards consumed 132 gallons of fuel per hour for 0.38 mpg.

The optimum cruising speed occurred at 3,000 rpm and 21 mph, where the quad F350s burned 34.7 gallons per hour for 0.6 mpg. That equates to a 600-mile cruising range based on the 1,000-gallon fuel capacity.

HydraSports Custom's 5300 sets new benchmarks not only for size, but for construction technology and comfortable, user-friendly features. Any other center-console approaching this length will have a hard act to follow. 

HUK

PERFORMANCE FISHING



W W W . H U K G E A R . C O M



BY CHRIS WOODWARD

SEA FOX 288 COMMANDER

Half Cruiser, Half Fishing Fanatic



T

The August morning dawned pink and quiet, a surprising change from the violent tempest I'd witnessed the night before. Ryan Balderson and Jeff McNiven loaded a pile of fishing tackle, snacks and safety gear aboard the Sea Fox 288 Commander as it bobbed dockside at Bristol Marina in Charleston, South Carolina.

Balderson, Sea Fox vice president of product development and a tournament fisherman, and McNiven, a Sea Fox dealer from Australia, checked the fish boxes and bilge for any standing water the nighttime deluge might have left.

I boarded through the 288's new port side-entry door and walked to the bow to stow my camera gear inside the coffin box beneath the forward lounge. We tossed the lines and motored into a glass-calm Ashley River.

FORE AND AFT

At the bow, I glanced around at the ample plush seating aboard this new model, which incorporates the hull of the 286 Commander with a new

deck and that inboard-opening side door.

The forward lounge resembles a king-size padded beach chair with cupholders between the twin sides. Beneath the seats, the 75-gallon dry-storage coffin box measures 40 inches from the console forward, and easily accommodates gear bags and safety equipment.

U-shaped seating rims the forepeak. Passengers can sit facing astern, using full-size built-in cushions and curved backrests, or sit facing forward using backrests that fold out from the port and starboard bulkhead coaming. Beneath that seating lie 30 gallons of insulated storage.

While the 288 Commander's pointy end is all family fun and comfort, astern, it's all business — fishing business.

Sea Fox built the 288 Commander on the 286 hull, but designed a new deck with an inboard-opening side door for this recently introduced model.

COURTESY SEA FOX (2), CHRIS WOODWARD (OPPOSITE BOTTOM)

PERFORMANCE

POWER Twin Yamaha F300s
LOAD 90 gal. fuel, three crew
TOP SPEED 61 mph @ 5,900 rpm
TIME TO 30 MPH 6 sec.
BEST MPG 2.4 @ 32 mph (3,200 rpm)

HULL

LOA 28 ft.
BEAM 9 ft. 8 in.
DEADRISE 20 deg.
WEIGHT 5,000 lb. (dry)
DRAFT 1 ft. 6 in. (hull)
FUEL 200 gal.
MAX POWER 600 hp

MSRP \$147,900 (as tested)

SEA FOX BOATS

Moncks Corner, South Carolina
 843-761-6090
seafoxboats.com

Balderson had lined up trolling, casting and bottomfishing rods along the standard hardtop's rocket launcher, which comes with a pair of angled holders. He planted rods in the holders aft of the helm station and in the holders along the back of the transom bulkhead. He filled the 60-gallon pressurized transom livewell and throttled the boat easily onto plane.

We rounded the jetties outside of Charleston Harbor and motored south, looking for diving pelicans that would signal schooling pogies. A moderate swell and confused 2- to 4-foot seas remained as remnants of the previous night's storm.

Balderson kept the twin Yamaha F300s in the 2,700 to 3,000 rpm range, which gave us enough speed to make good time against the quartering head sea. Every once in a while, the ocean presented a sudden peak that threw the Sea Fox into a steep trough. The boat landed solidly with no vibration or rattle.

High-siding the 288 with the standard trim tabs, Balderson also kept us remarkably dry.

EASY BAIT PREP

We expected to see bait off the Morris Island lighthouse, but had to run about 2 miles from shore before we found pogies. Balderson pulled his cast net from a five-gallon bucket beneath a

The tackle station aft of the helm seating unit features a drop-down, fiddled shelf, perfect for rigging leaders. A 65-quart Yeti cooler slides out from beneath the module.

forward in-sole hatch and stepped atop the anchor locker.

The 288 also comes with a filler piece that makes the entire bow area an expansive foredeck, but a sure-footed captain can easily stand at the forepeak.

In one fell swoop, Balderson tossed the net over a menhaden mother lode. He walked the net astern and dropped the baits into the well. He lowered a perforated plexiglass divider into the wide oval opening to help further stabilize the water column and keep the baits from sloshing as the boat rocked.

About 15 miles offshore, we slowed near a buoy signaling artificial reef material at a site called the Charleston 60. We marked bait and fish on one of the two Garmin GPSMAP 7610XSV 10-inch sounder screens (one 7610 comes standard on the 288). I noted that the 288's tall center console offers ample room for displays up to 16 inches.

Balderson says the Charleston 60 attracts cobia, amberjacks, grouper and kingfish, but it also holds plenty of structure-hugging barracuda. As we slow-trolled around the site, the 'cudas slashed our mono leader.

Balderson quickly turned to the



tackle station behind the helm seating unit and opened its top hatch. As he lowered the door, it became a fiddled rigging shelf supported by wires. He reached in and found some wire leader, which he haywired to new hooks.

Using the rod holders just above that rigging shelf, anglers can easily prepare tackle. Just below the shelf, Sea Fox fitted a slide-out 65-quart Yeti cooler,

Sea Fox's Ryan Balderson used the inboard-opening side door to tail and later release three hefty king mackerel.



which can be deployed manually or by an electric actuator, so dead baits can be kept cool and within arm's reach.

The tackle station lies just a step forward of the livewell. Behind the livewell, a row of rod holders lets anglers bait up newly rigged rods with liveys they can quickly deploy.

FAIR FIGHT

Although we caught a few hefty 'cudas, we had dreams of even bigger toothy critters. "You want to run another 5 miles off to another spot?" Balderson asked.

"Of course!" I countered.

Balderson put an SD card into the Garmin and merged his tournament numbers with the unit's waypoints. He set a course on the plotter, and we jumped to plane.

This time, I took the starboard helm seat. The cup-shaped seat back and right armrest enveloped me, and the padded cushion bottom absorbed any shock from the ride. I stood, folded the bolster back to lean, and placed my feet on the top footrest for added height (which, at 5'1", I truly need.)

The 288 features a fairly steep console face, but Sea Fox thoughtfully placed a ledge above the steering wheel and binnacle that's perfect for a cell-phone or two. I would personalize that with some type of nonskid mesh. The console top features a small amount of space rimmed by a short, U-shaped windscreen, and there's an electronics box above the console, built into the standard hardtop.

At Balderson's secret hot spot, we



Top: Step out on one of the boat's two swim platforms to fight fish around the outboards. **Above:** The 60-gallon transom livewell is pressurized and comes with a divider.



deployed four more live baits, employing the angled holders on each side of the hardtop as well as two of the gunwale rod holders. Balderson lowered one bait on a manual downrigger.

Within minutes, a kingfish crashed one of the pogies, and McNiven hauled in a 15-pounder, which Balderson tailed and released. The next two king mackerel proved comparatively larger. I fought one in the mid-20s while McNiven took a fish in the mid-30s.

The 288's 360-degree coaming pads make fighting a fish comfortable from just about any quarter. However, because of my short stature, I found the gunwales a bit high. On the other hand, ample freeboard does add to the safety factor for families.

When fighting a fish near the outboards, you can step atop the port or starboard fold-down transom jump seats and move aft to one of two dual swim platforms. The portside door also facilitates bringing a fish aboard for release or to stow in one of the cockpit's two in-sole 35-gallon insulated fish boxes (with overboard discharge).

to gauge how cleanly it handled a following sea. Using a slight bit of tab to even the load, I felt no bow steer, and the center-console ran effortlessly, smoothly and dryly at about 3,000 rpm.

Inside the river, I carved ever-sharper turns in both directions with the standard power-assist steering. The speed bled off only slightly as the boat arced with no slipping or excess banking.

We ran the boat with and against the tidal current, averaging a top speed of 61 mph at 5,900 rpm, achieving 1.18 mpg. The 288 sprinted off the line to reach 30 mph in just six seconds, exhibiting only slight to moderate bow rise without tabs.

On the calm inshore waters, we motored at 3,200 rpm for a most economical 2.4 mpg at 32 mph.

Combining a smooth ride with serious fishability, plus comfort and finishing touches like friction hinges, a pressurized livewell and hydraulic shocks on many hatches, this 288 offers the complete offshore cruising and angling package. 

BY THE NUMBERS

As the day heated up, the seas built. I ran the 288 back to Charleston Harbor



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REGULATOR 41

Demonstrating Offshore Quality and Performance



As I approached the docks in the pre-dawn darkness, the soft glow of blue courtesy LEDs signaled the presence of the new Regulator 41 at Pirate's Cove Marina in Manteo, North Carolina. Local fishing guide Brendan Strum welcomed me aboard the vessel, the largest model ever from Edenton, North Carolina-based Regulator Marine.

As we awaited the rest of our crew, Strum outlined the game plan for our day of fishing. "We're going to run out about 50 miles and troll rigged ballyhoo for white marlin from outriggers," he said. "But you never know what we might hook out there." His words would echo in my brain later in the day.

I stowed my gear inside the step-down center console, accessible from the port side and abundantly lit with LED lights, where I found roomy, posh accommodations, including a dinette with a teak table that converts to a berth for two; a galley with an inductive cooktop, microwave, countertop/sink and fridge set amid wood-veneer cabinetry; and an enclosed head compartment with a porcelain toilet and stand-up shower.

The standard 10,000 Btu air-conditioning system (powered by an 8 kw Fischer Panda diesel generator or shore power) cools the cabin and bridge deck. Maximum cabin headroom measured an astounding 7½ feet.

Returning topside, I was greeted by Regulator's Capt. Al Partin, company photographer Jeremy Groves and local fishing guide Frank Adams. "It might be a bit sporty out there," said Partin, as he fired up the four Yamaha F350 outboards on the brawny center-console. "The forecast is calling for 5-foot seas with 15-knot winds, but we have the right boat for it."

Partin used the Yamaha Helm Master low-speed joystick to easily extricate the 41 from its tight slip along the marina seawall. As we

Regulator's new 41 offers a smooth-riding hull and features that appeal to serious offshore anglers. We recorded a top speed of 63.5 mph.

COURTESY REGULATOR MARINE / JEREMY GROVES (3)

Comfortable three-across helm seats place the captain in the center. Flip-up bolsters serve as leaning posts while standing.

idled out in the gray light of morning, a number of Carolina battlewagons did the same. “At least we won’t be alone out there,” the captain remarked.

As a procession of 10 fishing boats streaked across Roanoke Sound, I noted that the Regulator 41 was the only center-console fishing machine heading offshore on this mid-August day. I wondered if the 41 would be able to keep pace.

We wound our way around the channel markers and shoals dotting the sound at 46½ mph and 4,500 rpm, burning about 65 gallons of fuel per hour, resulting in 0.71 mpg on the 5-mile run to the Outer Banks. A trio of Raymarine gSI65 multifunction displays, set respectively on chart-plotter, fish-finder and engine-instrumentation modes, helped guide the way.

Forward vision proved outstanding, thanks in part to the 9½-inch-high bridge deck with a Flexiteek sole, which offers a nicely elevated view when standing at the helm. The 22-inch-high wraparound console windshield protected the helm.

High winds over the previous few days had piled up sand where the channel once was, forcing Partin to blaze a fresh trail through Oregon Inlet. The



captain deftly piloted the 41 through the calmer sections amid a cauldron of white water, though we still had to climb up and over a series of standing 8-footers — the deep-V hull landing smoothly each time.

Once outside the inlet, confused seas turned the Atlantic Ocean into something resembling a freshly plowed potato patch. Partin found a comfortable cruising speed at 28½ mph at 3,000 rpm, where the quads burned 36½ gallons per hour for about 0.78 mpg. I could sense the solid construction underpinning this boat; nary a creak nor rattle did I hear.

Regulator’s 41 offers three-across helm seating with wraparound armrests and flip-up bolsters. Three individual fold-down footrests on the seat base let you prop your knees up, while an angled footrest at the base of the console allows you to brace yourself in rougher conditions.

Other crewmembers found a place to relax on the 50-inch-wide bench seat that folds out from a recess in the transom. Coaming bolsters that encircle the interior also serve as cushioned backrests for the bench seat.

Within the transom bulkhead is an 84-gallon fish box. My test boat had the optional 12-volt DC chiller system to minimize the need for ice. A pair of 40-gallon livewells flank the transom fish box.

WAGON RACE

As we cruised offshore, I noticed we were passing every one of the battlewagons that had left before us — a testament to the sea-taming ability of the 41-foot-3-inch Regulator.

Soon, we were near the edge of the continental shelf. Partin slowed to trolling speed — 1,200 rpm and 8 mph with all four outboards in gear, where we burned 8 gallons per hour for 1 mpg. He climbed the ladder on the aft hardtop supports to pilot from the elevated second station. As Adams and Strum deployed the Taco Marine 380 Grand Slam outriggers and set out the



The two-person lounge on the forward portion of the center console features angled backrests and fold-down armrests.

PERFORMANCE

POWER Four Yamaha F350 outboards
LOAD 500 gal. fuel, five crew
TOP SPEED 63.5 mph @ 6,000 rpm
TIME TO 30 MPH 8 sec.
BEST MPG 0.81 @ 35.9 mph (3,500 rpm)

HULL

LOA 41 ft. 3 in. (47 ft. 3 in w/ bracket and engines)
BEAM 12 ft. 6 in.
DEADRISE 24 deg.
WEIGHT Approx. 20,100 lb. (dry w/ engines)
DRAFT 3 ft. 1 in. (motors down)
FUEL 600 gal.
MAX POWER 1,400 hp

MSRP as tested \$793,325 (w/ quad Yamaha F350s)

REGULATOR MARINE INC.
 Edenton, North Carolina
 252-482-3837
regulatormarine.com

trolling lines, I explored the forward area. Recognizing that boating families also enjoy an occasional weekend cruise, Regulator has equipped the 41 with abundant creature comforts, including a motorized dining table in the bow. Fully retracted, it forms part of the 41's single-level deck, but at the push of a button it elevates to become the middle section of an expansive lounge pad; ascending to the highest level, it becomes a dining table surrounded by U-shaped seating. The bow seating also converts to a pair of forward-facing lounges with flip-up backrests.

One of my favorite places aboard the 41 is the 5-foot-wide seat with an angled backrest in front of the console. At the foot of the 45-inch-long lounger is a 240-quart locker with special racks for stowing a five-gallon bucket. Under the bow deck is another fish box, this one boasting a 156-gallon capacity.

MARLIN MADNESS

Just when I was wrapping up my inspection, a clicker on one of the trolling rods sent the crew scrambling. "You handle this one," Adams said, handing me the rod as the 30-pound-test monofilament melted off the reel.

The hooked fish refused to slow down, so Partin gave chase, allowing me to put line back on the reel. Strum's earlier comment about hooking anything came to mind. Based on the fish's powerful and erratic behavior, Adams and Strum guessed it was a blue marlin.

The responsive handling proved to be a strong advantage as the fish tried



Quadruple Yamaha F350 outboards lend the Regulator 41 outstanding responsiveness, whether maneuvering in the tight quarters of a marina or battling a marlin. Our boat was also equipped with the Yamaha Helm Master system with low-speed joystick control.

to sweep under the boat on a number of occasions. The 9½-by-7-foot aft cockpit also offered plenty of room for me to maneuver. The 2-foot-4-inch aft gunwales allowed me to comfortably brace my legs.

Eighty minutes later, the fish finally jumped just 40 yards from the boat. It was indeed a blue marlin, estimated at 300 pounds. We were within minutes of wiring the fish, but this blue had other ideas.

With one sweep of its tail at the surface, it sounded, taking all of the line I had gained earlier. Exhausted and unable to move the marlin from the depths, I turned over the rod to Strum, who fought the fish for another 40 minutes before the line finally wore through and the fish broke off. We were clearly undergunned and lucky the fight lasted as long as it did, Strum said.

BY THE NUMBERS

Sea conditions took a turn for the better in the afternoon, but with no other bites by 3 p.m., we decided to head for home. Running at 5,000 rpm and over 50 mph, burning 0.64 gallons per hour, we reached Oregon Inlet in about an

hour. Inside the protected waters of Roanoke Sound, I gathered performance data. Turning Yamaha Saltwater Series II 15¼-by-21-inch three-blade stainless-steel propellers, the 41 leaped to plane in four seconds, reaching 30 mph in eight seconds, en route to a top speed of 63.5 mph at 6,000 rpm, where the quad F350s burned 132.5 gallons per hour for 0.48 mpg.

The most efficient cruising speed occurred at 3,500 rpm and 35.9 mph, with a burn rate of 44.2 for 0.81 mpg and a cruising range of 486 miles based on the 600-gallon fuel capacity.

Upon our return to Pirate's Cove Marina, Regulator president Joan Maxwell greeted us at the dock, giving me a chance to ask for her thoughts about the company's biggest boat ever. "Our goal wasn't just to build a big boat," said Maxwell, "but rather to offer customers looking for a large center-console the quality, features, performance and smooth ride they expect in a Regulator."

After spending a full day fishing offshore aboard the new 41, I can confidently say that the company has achieved its goal. 🐟



A motorized dining table converts the bow area into an expansive sun pad. It fully retracts to deck level for fishing action.



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RAIL-MOUNT OPTIONS

SOMETIMES IT'S CHALLENGING to find a way to mount antennas, small displays, point-of-view cameras, rod holders and even an EPIRB on a small fishing boat. Rail-mounting ranks as one of the best solutions for these situations. Companies such as Edson, Scotty, RAM and West Marine offer a host of rail-mounting options. Lacking space at my helm, I chose to rail-mount my wired stereo remote control and VHF mic clip on an interior T-top cross-member. In the past, I have also rail-mounted GPS antennas and small displays. One of my favorites is the Edson stainless-steel rail mount (about \$90), a robust rail-mounting system that lets you attach just about any antenna base or bracket to its optional high-density polyethylene base. — **Jim Hendricks**

SECURE A TRAY

I LIKE TO USE small plastic trays (the ones designed for organizing kitchen drawers) in places like on top of the console to stash small tackle items such as hooks, lures and sinkers aboard the boat. The trays cost only a few dollars each at retailers such as Bed Bath & Beyond. I drill holes in the bottoms for drainage and use peel-and-stick hook-and-loop strips (available at home-improvement stores) to keep the trays in place. You will find this an inexpensive and effective way of keeping your terminal tackle secure and handy. — **JH**



ONBOARD SIGNAGE

ASK ANY MEMBER of my family, and he or she will confirm that I'm a big fan of labeling stuff. This becomes even more important on a boat, so crewmembers (especially new ones) can quickly locate key safety items such as life jackets, fire extinguishers and signal flares, as well as identify switches and the contents of lockers and tackle boxes. Look for peel-and-stick adhesive signs and labels at marine retailers, or make your own using a Dymo LetraTag Plus LT-100H label maker (about \$29). Use the waterproof vinyl label tape and bold lettering so the signs are easy to spot and read. — **JH**



You can find signs and placards for fire extinguishers (right) and flares (below) at marine supply stores. Another option is to use a label maker (left) to create signs using waterproof label tape.



PORTABLE WASHDOWN

MOST BOATS TODAY have raw-water washdown systems, but not all have fresh-water washdowns. Rather than going without fresh water, consider a portable shower for rinsing the deck, washing up or cleaning tackle items. I really like the Big Kahuna portable shower with a 4.7-gallon polyethylene tank (about \$130). Plug it into a 12-volt receptacle and use the hose coil and shower nozzle to spray away the salt, or to just cool off on a hot, humid day on the ocean. — **JH**



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BY CHRIS WOODWARD

SPEAKERS



JL AUDIO

Top: A pair of 7.7-inch smaller-boat speakers. Bottom: An 8.8-inch speaker for a larger vessel.



KICKER

Left: An 8-inch deck speaker. Right: A 6.5-inch speaker for the cabin. All have built-in LEDs.



ROCKFORD FOSGATE

Rockford would use multiple 6-inch (left) and 8-inch (right) coaxial speakers for the installs.

SYMPHONY AT SEA

TURN UP THE VOLUME WITH PROPER AUDIO SYSTEMS ON YOUR NEXT OFFSHORE TRIP

Whether you captain the average 25-footer or a plush 40-foot center-console machine, a quality audio system can really enhance your time on the water. Yes, some anglers prefer silence or the subtle whistle of a cooling trade wind, but many enjoy mood-elevating music or the chance to follow a favorite team with a satellite-service feed.

Of course, marine audio is not your brother's bass-thumping car stereo. Not only must marine systems be completely marinized and protected against corrosion, but they must project over the roar of outboard engines and the ambient sounds of nature.

To help you design an adequate system for your center-console boat, I asked audio companies to suggest sound packages for a typical 25-foot open boat as well as a 40-plus-footer with a center-console cabin. Three companies responded with varying proposals. Here are their suggestions.

SMALL-BOAT SOUND

"What you really ultimately are looking at, even before the size of the vessel, is what you truly want to achieve with the audio," says Alan Wenzel, vice president of JL Audio in South Florida. "Do you want the audio to just be background noise when at low speed? Do you want it to be heard at higher speed? Do you want just one particular area to be filled [with sound], or do you want to rock the house out?"

Once JL assesses a customer's needs, it's time to talk budget and build a system. Of course, all three audio companies that responded to my request echoed a similar customization protocol. But they agreed to offer details of their most popular packages.

•**JL AUDIO (Miramar, Florida):** JL recommends two audio or "listening" zones — one at the helm, one at the bow. In each zone, two 7.7-inch coaxial speakers (MX770-CX) and a single 10-inch subwoofer (MX10IB3) should be installed, for a total of four speakers and two subwoofers.

JL recommends its brand-new MediaMaster



For a small-boat installation, JL recommends its MediaMaster source unit, a six-channel amplifier and two 10-inch subwoofers.

100 head unit on the console, wired to a six-channel amplifier (M600/6).

Wenzel says the helm is always the primary listening zone because that's where the boat owner spends most of his or her time. But wherever people congregate, you should create an audio experience. He'd mount the helm speakers and subwoofer toward the floor; ideally, the subwoofer would mount between the two speakers. He'd mount the bow speakers in the liner, close to the forepeak (as far forward as possible, and rear-firing).

The six-channel amp will drive all four speakers and two subwoofers with 45 watts of power per channel. It mounts inside the center console and as close to the battery source as possible.

Total package price: \$1,690

•**KICKER (Stillwater, Oklahoma):** Kicker suggests four KM8 8-inch coaxial speakers (two in the bow area and two either at the console or under-gunwale in the cockpit, depending on the boat's layout). Kicker's speakers all have built-in LED lights that brighten



Kicker's plan for a 25-foot CC would include a 10-inch subwoofer, a five-channel amplifier, a Premium Media Center and remote control.

and dim. They're available in single- or multiple-color versions (with up to 20 color choices). A remote control (KMLC) for the lighting has been added to this package.

Kicker also recommends one 10-inch subwoofer (KM10) in the console; a five-channel amplifier (KXM800.5); and the brand-new Premium Media Center/Source, the KMC20, with Bluetooth streaming, AM/FM radio, USB port, auxiliary inputs, CAN-Bus and Sirius XM.

Kicker's marine product-line manager Phil White says the five-channel amp can push up to 100 watts of power to each of the four speakers and comes with a separate channel for the subwoofer.

The Premium Media Center is the brand's flagship product. It comes with features developed specifically for marine use, including a sunlight-viewable full-color display. It also offers numerous source options, such as auxiliary inputs, dual USB ports, and AM/FM and weather-radio bands.

The head unit also comes with a CAN-Bus connection that could eventually allow anglers to run the stereo through their onboard multifunction display, but Kicker has not yet released the software to enable the feature.

Total package price: \$2,838.70 (Note: KMC20 pricing is an estimate.)

•**ROCKFORD FOSGATE (Tempe, Arizona):** Rockford says it would mount two 8-inch coaxial speakers (PM282) in the hardtop, and four in the deck. Typically, the hardtop speakers point straight down; one set of deck speakers mount at the bow and another set in the cockpit. One four-channel (600-watt) amp (PM600X4) would run all eight speakers, and a secondary two-channel amp (PM300X2) would drive one 12-inch subwoofer (PM212S4).

Rockford recommends its PMX-2 Marine Source Unit, which comes with Bluetooth, USB port, AM/FM and weather-radio bands, and auxiliary inputs, plus a seven-band equalizer. The source unit can be controlled with an optional wired remote control (PMX-1R) that mounts on the transom and comes with a full-color screen. The



Rockford Fosgate's package includes a 12-inch subwoofer, PMX-2 source unit, a four-channel amp and a two-channel amp.

company also suggests an additional USB mount for the glove box.

Total package price: \$2,749.91

REALLY ROCKIN' OUT

A larger vessel in the 40-plus-foot range obviously requires more speakers, and usually necessitates four rather than two listening zones, Wenzel says. Zones include the bow, amidships, helm and cockpit.

•**JL AUDIO:** Wenzel suggests placing two 8.8-inch speakers (M880-CX) in the bow with a 10-inch subwoofer (M10IB5) in between. He'd mount another pair of 8.8-inch speakers just forward of the console, amidships, placing them lower in the liner to fire



Two coaxial speakers with a subwoofer between fire aft from the bow to create a listening zone for passengers cruising or fishing.



Additional equipment for JL's larger-boat package includes two eight-channel amps (above) and two six-channel amps, plus two tweeter speakers (not pictured).

into the center of the boat.

At the helm or console, he'd install two 8.8-inch speakers or four 7.7-inch speakers, two on each side, and two 10-inch subwoofers mounted on the console, firing toward the liner. He'd also add two tweeter speakers (M100-CT), about 1 inch in diameter, on the console, facing in and slightly up toward the helmsman, or he'd mount them on top of the console. These are higher-frequency speakers that help overcome ambient noises at speed. (Wind blowing 40 to 60 mph dissipates high frequencies.)

In the cockpit, he'd mount two 8.8-inch speakers and a pair of 10-inch subwoofers. Wenzel says he'd use two eight-channel amps (M800/8) for the speakers, to bridge each channel. Each channel has 100 watts of power; he can take two channels and make one 200-watt channel.

He'd install two 600-watt monoblock amplifiers (M600/1) for the subwoofers. The amps and a MediaMaster 100 head unit would mount at the console.

Total package price: \$5,720

•**KICKER:** On deck, Kicker would install eight 8-inch speakers with multicolor LEDs (KM8): a pair on or near the transom, under-gunwale; a pair flanking the helm; another pair forward of the console; and a pair at



A 40-plus-foot center-console usually requires more speakers to create up to four audio areas aboard. This setup would rock the house!



For a 40-plus-footer, Kicker would include two four-channel amplifiers (left) and a subwoofer amplifier (right), in addition to more speakers.

the bow. He'd use the Premium Media Center (KMC20), two four-channel amplifiers (KXM400.4), one subwoofer amp (KXM1200.1) and two subwoofers (KM10) — one firing forward toward the bow and one aft — and include the LED remote (KMLC).

Belowdecks, in the console cabin, Kicker would mount four 6.5-inch speakers with multicolor LEDs (KM65), plus a remote (KMLC) and one four-channel amp (KXM400.4).

Total package price: \$6,528.95 (Note: KMC20 pricing is an estimate.)

•**ROCKFORD FOSGATE:** Rockford suggests mounting four 6-inch speakers (PM262) in the hardtop and four 8-inch speakers (PM282) on deck (two in the bow, two in the transom). One two-channel amplifier (PM500X2) drives

the deck speakers, and a second two-channel amplifier (PM400X2) drives the hardtop speakers. The reason for that, Rockford says, is because the head unit (PMX-5) offers dual zone control: The helmsman can adjust the hardtop speaker volume independent of the deck speakers.



Rockford chose its PMX-5 head unit, plus two 10-inch subwoofers and more two- and four-channel amps to drive more speakers.

Two 10-inch subwoofers (PM210S4) would mount forward and two aft, with one 1,000-watt amp (PM1000X1BD) to drive all four. One wired remote (PMX-1R) could be installed at the bow and one at the transom, and an additional USB accessory plug could reside in the glove box.

Total package price: \$3,799.88



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GRADY-WHITE 191 COASTAL EXPLORER

BY CHRIS WOODWARD

WHEN GRADY'S 251 Coastal Explorer debuted last year, it redefined the bay boat. With the 191 CE, the company has packed most of the same details into a smaller package. Both Coastal Explorers also sport the company's trademark SeaV2 hull.

The 191's forward casting deck doubles as a sun pad with the addition of optional cushions. Beneath the platform, Grady divided the storage space to accommodate an anchor and a 37-gallon insulated fish box. Forward of the console, a molded seat lifts for

access to either a 17-gallon insulated cooler or an optional livewell.

The aft bench seating folds to enlarge the casting deck, which covers a 12-gallon insulated box that can be outfitted as a livewell. Vertical rod holders are located beside the forward console seat and in the gunwales.

The Coastal Explorer's low gunwales make releasing fish easy. An aft boarding ladder makes the boat well suited for anglers who prefer to wade-fish the flats or roam the beaches.

The 191 can carry 52 gallons of fuel and is rated for up to 200 horsepower.



SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	19 ft. 4 in.
BEAM	8 ft. 2 in.
WEIGHT	2,360 lb.
DRAFT	14 in. (hull)
TRANSOM DEADRISE	14.5 deg.
MSRP	\$58,350 (base boat w/ Yamaha F150)

WORLD CAT 320DC

BY CHRIS WOODWARD

BUILT WITH STYLE, FUN, ride and fishing in mind, World Cat's new 320DC dual-console comes with 125 gallons of insulated fish boxes, a 35-gallon livewell astern and 250 gallons of fuel capacity. The dual air-conditioned cabins include such features as a double berth and a full stand-up head.

World Cat added a standard windlass with helm and bow controls and a fresh-water washdown in the anchor locker. The 320DC's bow area offers double-wide port and starboard lounges with dry, insulated storage beneath, and an MP3 outlet.

Amidships, the wraparound windshield rises all the way to the standard hardtop, creating an enclosed bridge feel. The hardtop comes with overhead lighting and a standard flip-down flat-screen TV. The portside seat module configures in six different ways to offer lounging for guests or an

on-watch perch for mates.

The 320DC has both side and transom doors for boarding people or big fish. The 40 square feet of cockpit space is rimmed by bolsters and rod holders. World Cat also provides a refrigerator, sink and grill for preparing your catch.



SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	32 ft. 2 in.
BEAM	10 ft. 6 in.
WEIGHT	11,600 lb.
HULL DRAFT	16 in.
TRANSOM DEADRISE	Catamaran
MSRP	\$342,963 (w/ Twin Yamaha 300 hp four-stroke package, Command Link Plus)



PLANO MARINE TRUNKS

Plano's new **marine trunks** are made from high-impact plastic with reinforced lids and heavy-duty latches. The 56-quart box measures 24 by 15 by 13 inches; the 68-quart box measures 30 by 14¼ by 12¾ inches; and the 108-quart box measures 37¼ by 14 by 18½ inches. All sizes feature an O-ring seal and are treated with a UV-protective coating. The marine-gray-and-blue boxes are stackable and come with molded ports so they can be secured with tie-downs and padlocks. The trunks cost \$49.99, \$59.99 and \$79.99.



BLUEFIN LED COLOR-CHANGING LIGHTS

Bluefin LED has launched a range of **color-changing underwater lights** that provide anglers with multiple ways to illuminate the ocean beneath their hulls. Available in surface-mount and through-hull models, the RGBW LEDs boast 2,500 to 10,000 fixture lumens with unique internal-driver technology to reduce cost and installation time. The new LEDs are offered in red, green, blue and white with various color-changing options that can be scrolled, dimmed, sequenced or strobed. The lights cost \$239 to \$1,799.



STAR BRIE ULTIMATE VINYL GUARD

Star brite says its new **Ultimate Vinyl Guard with PTFE** is like sunblock for your vinyl. It also enhances the appearance of vinyl, rubber, plastic and leather surfaces, giving it a durable, semigloss finish. The PTFE polymers bond to the treated surface to create a barrier against UV damage and to help repel stains and dirt. Available in a 32-ounce spray bottle, it costs \$24.99 at West Marine.

SHAKESPEARE AM/FM ANTENNAS

Shakespeare has introduced **three new AM/FM marine antennas**, made of stainless steel to match popular VHF antenna styles 5415, 5215 and 5250. The Classic Style 4354 AM/FM antenna (\$105.95) measures 2 feet long, features static protection, and incorporates a 19.5-foot cable with a solderless connector. It comes with an L-shaped mounting bracket. The Classic Style 4355 (\$77.95) is a 36-inch whip with loading coil for AM/FM reception. It includes coax cable and an L mounting bracket. Style 4356 (\$74.95) is a low-profile AM/FM whip that's 36 inches long. Its element is a sealed, tin-plated copper-wire coil. It's designed primarily for vessels with limited space.



These three newest AM/FM antennas from Shakespeare were designed to match the company's popular VHF antennas. They're made of stainless steel.



BY JIM HENDRICKS



OVER THE BAR

12 TIPS FOR RUNNING DICEY OCEAN INLETS

From the shifting Outer Banks of North Carolina to the tempestuous coast of the Pacific Northwest, boating anglers regularly face potentially hazardous inlets. Entrances such as those at Florida's Boynton and St. Lucie inlets, Oregon's Columbia River bar, California's Golden Gate, and North Carolina's Oregon Inlet host some of the world's most challenging sea conditions.

A combination of factors can turn inlets nasty in a hurry, says Bill Cordes, director of sales and marketing for Opa Locka, Florida-based Invincible Boats. Cordes has

run inlets all of his adult life, and witnessed breakers so tall you couldn't see over the top.

"A powerful outgoing tide streaming through a narrow channel and a strong onshore wind tend to pile up steep seas," Cordes explains. "Combine these two factors

with shoaling, and you have big, breaking waves at the inlet, resulting in very dangerous conditions."

Cordes and others offer the following tips for staying safe when running an inlet, with special advice for tackling entrances that are new to you.



The most treacherous seas can occur as you leave or return to port. The combination of a strong outgoing tide funneling through a narrow inlet, onshore winds, and shoal areas often results in large, breaking waves that can swamp or capsize boats.



Running a raging inlet with an inappropriately small boat or choosing the wrong path over a bar can result in catastrophe. Though your crew might object, some days it's prudent to cancel the trip.

[1] Tap Local Knowledge. If you don't know the inlet, ask local captains in advance for advice, says Cordes. "Reaching out to a local charter captain or commercial fisherman is a good idea," he explains. "It's entirely OK to ask if you can follow them out, as they know the best line through the entrance, which can change often from shifting sandbars." You might even hire a guide with a strong knowledge of the inlet to show you the way, Cordes suggests. In either case, use your chart plotter to record the track taken through the inlet so you can retrace the path a day or two later. Keep in mind, however, that the safest course through an inlet can change. Don't assume that the track you use today will still be safe a month from now.

[2] Know the Conditions. Stay posted on the latest weather conditions and tides, not only for your departure time, but also for your return, as knowing when to cross is just as important as knowing where to cross. "A strong outgoing tide is always cause for concern," says Chad Normoyle, a Shimano/G.Loomis pro staffer who often crosses the infamous Columbia River bar to fish for albacore off Oregon and Washington. "You might get out



OK, but if you time the return poorly, your boat's safety might be in jeopardy."

[3] Don't Be in a Hurry. Whether heading out or in, take some time to study the inlet before making your run, especially if you are unfamiliar with the bar, says Todd Leggett, product engineering prototype supervisor for Grady-White Boats in Greenville, North Carolina. He suggests studying the cycles of waves at the bar; there's a rhythm to them. "You want to cross when the waves are smaller," he advises. You can also check out the inlet the day before, perhaps making a trial run in and out, laying down a track

on your chart plotter to record the best line over the bar.

[4] Run the Right Boat. Make sure your boat has sufficient size, buoyancy and seakeeping ability, Cordes advises. "The last thing you want is a boat that doesn't track well in a following sea, or tends to stuff the bow into a head sea, or is overwhelmed by the waves," he says. The boat should also ride relatively level at low speeds. "If the boat has a lot of bow rise, it's difficult to see the waves, buoys, jetties and other objects in front of you, impairing your ability to navigate the inlet safely," Cordes says. "Know the capabilities and limitations of your boat."

[5] Run the Boat Right. Look for the area of the bar or inlet that has the smallest waves. This is usually the area with the deepest water. When returning in a big following sea, keep the boat straight and on the backside of a wave, experts suggest. Match the wave's speed, trying to stay midway between the crest behind you and the one ahead. Avoid overtaking the wave and surfing down its face, as this can lead to catastrophic pitchpoling (flipping stern over bow) or broaching

Having plenty of reserve power ranks as one of the most critical requirements when running a potentially dangerous inlet.





Breaking waves and white water indicate shoal areas to avoid. Aim for the calmer water and smaller swells when running an inlet.

(capsizing as the boat turns sideways toward a breaking wave). By the same token, apply enough power to keep ahead of the wave astern and prevent it from overtaking you. Adjust your throttles to stay in the trough until you have passed the danger zone.

[6] Have Plenty of Power. Safely running a raging inlet requires that you have immediate reserve power to maneuver out of harm's way. "You might not always need the extra power, but having extra horsepower relative to your boat size can help keep you safe," says Cordes. For example, when trying to stay ahead of a breaking wave, a punch of the throttle keeps you in position. Few things are more dreadful than having an underpowered boat in a raging inlet, whether trying to climb up the face of a wave or hoping to outrun it.

[7] Don't Go at Night. Running an inlet proves exponentially more difficult and dangerous when you can't see. "A lot of guys like to head offshore before daylight to fish for tuna, and that means crossing the bar in the dark," says Normoyle. "Every year there are accidents as a result." So Normoyle's advice is to wait until daylight to head out, and to return early enough to cross back over before sundown. The same advice applies when there's heavy fog or torrential rain.

Waves sweeping across Oregon's Columbia River bar grow to immense sizes. The Coast Guard uses special rollover craft to rescue boats that fall victim to this infamous Pacific inlet.

[8] Wait a Few Hours. Sometimes, waiting just a few hours for a slack tide can make the difference between a calm crossing and a calamitous one. "Even though the wind might be blowing, the lack of an outgoing tide can render the inlet more manageable," Cordes points out. So if the inlet is too rough, consider waiting out the tides, whether you're heading out in the morning or coming back in the afternoon. Another option is to chart a course or trailer your boat to another, more user-friendly inlet.

[9] Wear Life Jackets. No matter what the conditions, if they're not already doing so, instruct your crew to don life jackets when running an inlet. "It's always a good idea to ask them to stay seated with their life jackets on," says Cordes. Get all crew members out

of the cabin or other enclosure, as the buoyancy of their life jackets might prevent escape should the boat capsize. If, as the helmsman, you must remain in an enclosed space, such as a pilothouse, wear a manually inflatable life jacket.

[10] Wear PLBs. On days when things appear dicey, make sure crew are wearing PLBs (personal locator beacons) on their life jackets. Also be ready to deploy the EPIRB (emergency position-indicating radio beacon) in an emergency to assist first responders in rescue efforts.

[11] Notify Authorities. Radio the Coast Guard or harbor patrol ahead of time if you are experiencing any kind of engine problems or other issues that might impair your boat's ability to safely return through the inlet. They might choose to stand by inside the inlet to quickly lend assistance in the event of an emergency.

[12] Don't Go. Some days, when the inlet is raging, you need to let prudence prevail. "Don't be afraid to err on the side of caution and cancel a trip," says Cordes. "Your crew might be disappointed, but as the captain, it's your job to make sure everyone stays safe to fish another day." 🐟



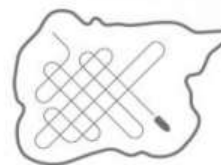
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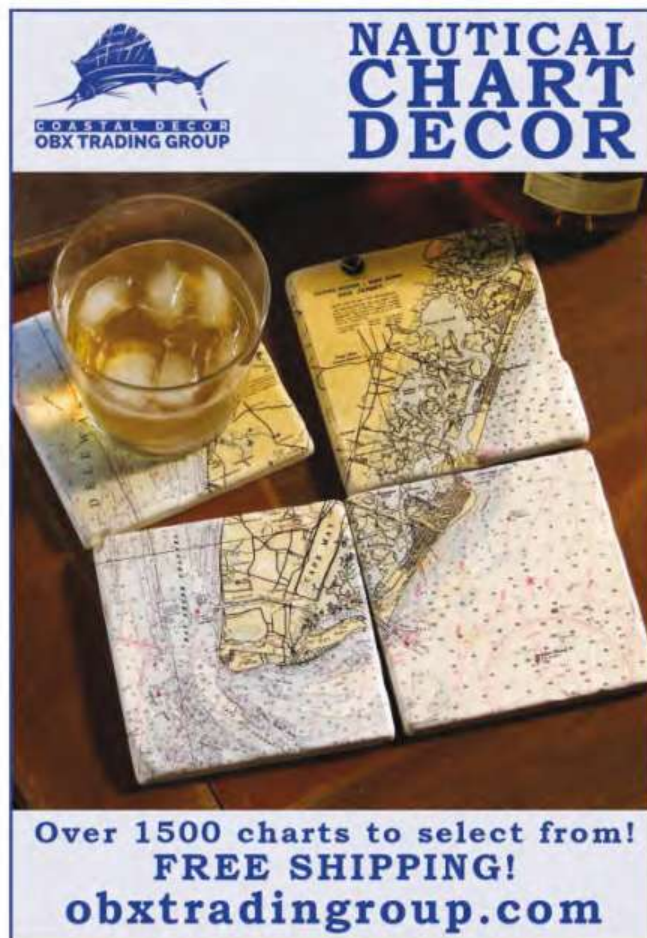
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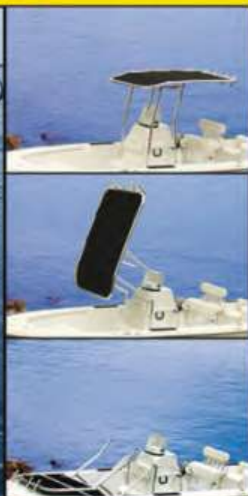
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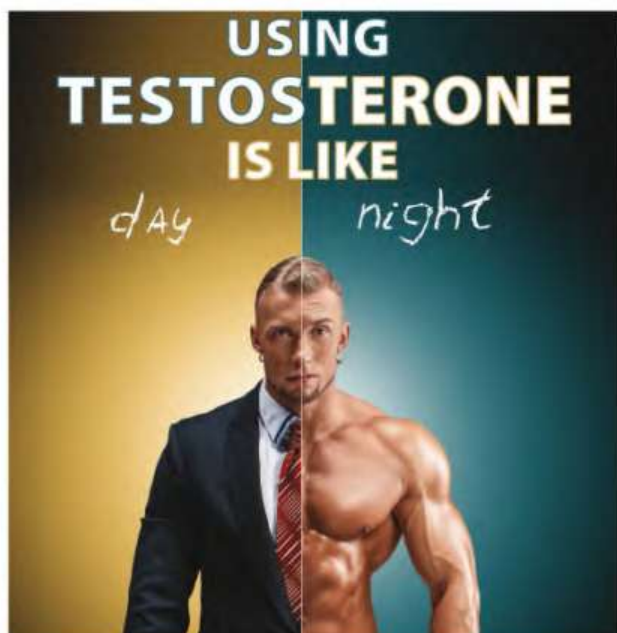


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